

Latter-Day Saint Kinship: The Salvific Power of the Family

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Introduction

Since its inception in 1830, the people of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Days have evoked reactions from the public, ranging from confusion to outrage. In turn, the Church community has struggled to fit into secular society. The Church has constantly worked to craft and improve its relationship with the world. Recently, in 2018, Latter-Day Saint President Russell M. Nelson explained that the “Lord has impressed upon [his] mind the importance of the name he has revealed for the Church.”¹ Latter-Day Saints reject the title ‘Mormons,’ asking outsiders to refer to members of the Church as Latter-Day Saints. Non-members of the Church misunderstand the Latter-Day Saint community, right down to its name.

For the last two centuries, the Church community has been mysterious and confusing to the ‘outside world.’ What exactly do the Latter-Day Saints believe? Why do they behave the way that they do? Why do they seem so ‘other’, in relation to the greater society in which they live? This thesis will utilize the lens of the Latter-Day social structure-- from family life to marital expectations, to dating guidelines-- in order to demonstrate that this religion is unique due to its view of the family as sacred. An understanding of Latter-Day Saints’ family life is the key to understanding their Church because Latter-Day Saint religion is deeply relational, embedded in gender, marriage, and the family. This paper is about the family values of the Latter-Day Saint Church. It will walk the reader along the path that the Latter-Day Saints believe themselves to be

¹ Urquhart, Jim. “Don’t use ‘Mormon’ as Church Name, President Says.” *NBC News*, sec. U.S. News, August 17, 2018, p.1

on, from before birth until after death, showing that one never walks alone, but rather is constantly with one's family.

Within these pages, readers will come to understand Latter-Day Saint love and kinship. The romantic, familial, and platonic love within Church communities will be illustrated and analyzed to form an understanding of how a people connect and relate in accordance with the ultimate relationship, which is with Heavenly Father. In other words, because Latter-Day Saints love their Heavenly Father, they also love one another, as fellow children of their God. Human relationships are driven by the relationship with the divine. Thus, because person to person love is a gift from God, Latter-Day Saints consider human relationships sacred as well as salvific. It is this immense importance placed upon the familial love that has distinguished The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints from other American religions. It is what has caused both an attachment to conservative and hyper-traditional family structures as well as radical practices such as polygamy. The adoption of these unique Latter-Day Saint constructions has ebbed and flowed throughout time as the religious group searches to find the perfect way to mirror their love of Heavenly Father in their relationship with each other. The marital and family-rearing norms will become clear, ultimately constructing an encompassing view of Latter-Day Saint love.

In order to best orchestrate a deep and meaningful examination of the Latter-Day people, readers will be introduced to one particular person, a young Latter-Day Saint woman. This woman will be journeying through life by walking along a running track. The running track will act as a metaphor that represents the cyclical movement of Latter-Day Saint teleology. A running track's starting line and finish line are the same points. To complete a full lap, the runner will

finish exactly where she started. This is true, too, for all Latter-Day Saints. They began their life's journey in the same heavenly realm that they hope to return to at the end of their earthly existence. This conceptualization will allow readers to understand the circular nature of a Latter-Day Saint's world view. Her starting point and end goal will be one and the same, yet her journey to arrive at the finish line will provide her with spiritual and personal growth and empowerment. Along this cyclical path, readers will come to understand the experience of one Latter-Day Saint person, and her family, as they live, love, and exist within their Church.

Author's Background

In my time in the Colgate Department of Religion, I have studied various religious traditions. The common thread that has woven through most of my courses is my fascination with love. In my first year, I wrote papers on Pope Francis' encyclical, *The Joy of Love* and Navajo Indians' perception of love among kin. In my Sophomore year, I wrote essays about familial love that endured among survivors of the Holocaust, and about Rati, the Hindu Goddess of love. Earlier this year, I explored death rituals in various religious traditions and found that all of them helped to maintain a relationship between living people and their dead loved ones. I have learned that all religious traditions are deeply impacted by love. During Theory and Method in the Study of Religion, I took my first stab at writing about Latter-Day Saint feminism, and found, for the first time, that loving community is what sustains Latter-Day Saint women

fighting to have their voices heard within their tradition. Thus, my study of religion has also been a study of love.

My experience with a Senior Seminar is slightly atypical in the Religion Department. I took Professor Vecsey's seminar, Navajo Creation Stories, my first year, rather than RELG 411, Senior Seminar in Religion, which is now normally required of Religion Majors. My thesis is driven by my experiences and passions in the breadth of my course material, rather than the framework of the 411 course. I decided to write a thesis about family, kinship, love, and relationship to close the loop on four years of studying religion and love.

I am fascinated by the idea that belief in a higher power, and relationship to an unseeable, unknowable, almighty force, draws us closer to those beside us. I have seen, time and again, that God orients us toward each other, making us communal and loving. This has, of course, proven to be true within the Latter-Day Saint religion. This, more so than any other tradition I have studied, is a religion of family and of love, as expressed in theology, ecclesiology, and sociology. It is a religion of holding close to those beside you, who are necessary for your -- and their -- salvation while focusing always on God. For Latter-Day Saints, love and piety go hand in hand, inextricably linked. However, the love of this religion is often quite limited, leaving behind those who do not fit the exact mold of the religion's ideal family member. It is a kind of love, like many others, that can be both inclusive and exclusive. My topic was the natural selection for my senior thesis.

Approach

The purpose of this paper is to transition the reader from an uninformed outsider of Latter-Day Saint religion and culture to an educated observer. My approach is phenomenological, exploring expressions and manifestations of the deeply held beliefs and ethics of the Latter-Day Saints. To understand why this group and its members behave the way they do, I dive deeply into their history, theology, current teachings, and their portrayal of themselves in academia and on social media. I also examine what non-members say about them in news media, sociological studies, and critical academia. I study scriptures, memoirs, biographies, news reports, academic papers, and speeches. Through a synthesis of this information, I hope to display how religious belief drives the everyday experience.

This is a paper about how family dictates why people are the way that they are, and behave the way they behave. It seeks to transform an atypical, mysterious, and confusing religious group, into a familiar, comprehensible people by shining a light on the family unit that sits at the center. It examines Latter-Day Saint family life through history in order to understand how it has evolved and changed while consistently being the religion's most valued aspect. I discovered in my research that Latter-Day Saint family values are deeply theological. The relational and familial aspects of the Latter-Day Saint experience are influenced by their teleological, ethical, and cosmological understandings. I aim to consider all these dimensions of Latter-Day Saint reality.

To understand a group of people is to search and to listen. To search is to seek out information through meticulous study; it is to engage in a conversation with the available literature. It is to dig for answers. To listen is to allow information to present itself. It is to learn what a person has to say without enforcing one's preconceptions upon the material. It is to gather the information that one finds. My questions drove my search; the information discovered beyond my questions forced me to listen.

In summation, the approach of this study is both concrete and abstract. I found answers to my questions, as well as answers to questions I had not asked. My commitment to both searching and listening helped me to understand the living body of Latter-Day Saints' lives. It led me to realize that for the members of this Church, the family is absolutely everything. When organized just right, it is the key to salvation and exaltation in life after death. I went searching for two categories of sources: one that would tell me about spirituality, and one that would tell me about family. Through listening I found that no distinction existed between the two. Everything I read about family pointed me toward religion, and all spiritual teachings I found were centered around the family. The two were impossible to separate. It became clear that Latter-Day Saints will not enjoy the fullness of heaven without their family-- it is impossible. Because of this, Latter-Day Saint familial and social practices are in fact exercises in spirituality. To love and to relate to a brother, mother, or spouse, is to stretch one's hand towards God within this Church. To love one another is to love Heavenly Father Himself.

History of the Church

“At last count, there were more than eleven million Saints the world over, and Mormonism is the fastest-growing faith in the Western Hemisphere. At present in the United States there are more Mormons than Presbyterians or Episcopalians. On the planet as a whole, there are now more Mormons than Jews. Mormonism is considered in some sober academic circles to be well on its way to becoming a major world religion--the first such faith to emerge since Islam.” -Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*

To consider why the social and familial practices of Latter-Day Saints are what they are, it is important to know the religion’s origins. Since its beginning, the Church has worked to share what its members believe to be Jesus Christ’s restored gospel with the earth before Christ’s Second Coming. From this gospel, the Church began to preach the principles of a sacred, polygamous family, which outraged non-Latter-Day Saint Americans. From its very beginning, the Church practiced unique, religious family values that set them apart from their contemporaries. However, before one can dive into the Church’s marriage practices, one must understand how the Latter-Day Saints came to be and how they established themselves in the world.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints began in 1830 in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, when the Book of Mormon was revealed to Joseph Smith by the Angel Moroni. Ten years prior, in 1820, God and His son Jesus appeared to Joseph Smith in his bedroom. They promised him that if he acted faithfully then, “further light would be revealed to him.”² Then, in 1827, God sent the Angel Moroni to lead Smith to the hills of Cumorah, where he found a set of metal plates and magic translation tools known as a Urim and Thummin. Smith translated from ancient Egyptian the history of a tribe of Israelites who settled in the New World.

²Snow, Erastus. *The Utah Pioneers*. 1 Vol. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1880.p.24

By 1830, five thousand copies of these translated texts had been printed under the title the Book of Mormon, named after the ancient prophet Mormon who originally transcribed the story told in the book. The scripture tells the story of a group of people known as the Nephites whom God led to Indigenous America to spread His Church across the world. When Smith first published it, six men found it to be true, and the group of them built a Church based upon the teachings of the Book of Mormon. They referred to themselves as the Saints of Latter-Days because they believed themselves to be restoring Jesus Christ's true Church to earth before His Second Coming. The group resided in New York until 1831 when Joseph Smith was divinely commanded to gather more members in Ohio and then Missouri.

When the Latter-Day Saints settled on the banks of the Mississippi River in Missouri, they attempted to build a utopian and independent religious community. Early members of the Church began practicing polygamy at this time and the United States Government was actively trying to squelch their freedom to do. A series of violent conflicts occurred between Latter-Day Saints and citizens of Missouri over the group's polygamous practices, leading to the Mormon War of 1838, which left the Church community defeated. In response, Joseph Smith petitioned President Martin Van Buren, as well as the Senate Judiciary Committee, to protect the Latter-Day Saints from future violence. The government denied Smith and his Saints protection, leading to years of antagonism between the Church and the U.S. government. Thus, in opposition to Van Buren, Smith ran for president in the 1844 race. His campaign ended when he was killed by an angry mob in Missouri that year. His leadership and prophet status within the Church was taken over by Brigham Young.

The Saints, “persecuted, robbed, and murdered, fled to Illinois, and built the city of Nauvoo. In 1846, they were driven by armed mobs and compelled to flee west of the Rocky Mountains,” to settle in the Mexican province that would become Utah territory.³

In the 1850s, the Latter-Day Saints moved on to Salt Lake City, where they would build the modern-day Zion. Brigham Young yearned to create a Latter-Day Saint empire in the intermountain West, beyond the reach of the federal government. He wanted Church members to be as far away from the government as possible so that they could practice polygamy and their other religious principles in peace. He called this haven ‘Deseret’ after the Book of Mormon term for a beehive, a symbol of industry and community.

In their western empire, the Latter-Day Saints “understood themselves to be the remnant of God’s chosen people, a Nation of Israel.”⁴ When first settled, the Latter-Day Saints held their Deseret as an independent political entity. Later on, they hoped for statehood and self-governance. However, their land became incorporated into the United States as the Utah territory through the Compromise of 1850. Starting in 1848, their once all-Latter-Day Saint sanctuary became multireligious and multiethnic as Americans moved to Utah in search of California’s gold. Though a hope that Utah was the Saints’ Zion continued to endure, many members of the Church struggled to assimilate into the newly integrated jurisdiction.

The Latter-Day Saints clashed with other American, Protestant Christians because of the Saints’ reluctance to separate the spiritual from the material and their propensity toward conflating spirituality, economic production, and communal living. Latter-Day Saints believed that plowing fields, digging ditches, and constructing homes were fundamentally religious acts,

³Snow, Erastus. *The Utah Pioneers*. 1 Vol. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1880. p.25

⁴McDannell, Colleen. *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.p.2

and that work could take precedence over worship. It was the immediacy of the divine and the prevalence of all-consuming labor that dictated religious life.

Additionally, Latter-Day Saints saw their Heavenly Father's revelation as ongoing, He continued to speak through the prophets, such as Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, who lived in modern times. As a result, they believed that the Bible was not the definitive word of God and that the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants were also works of Holy Scripture. Yet, the Latter-Day Saints were most threatened by the fact that they wanted Utah all to themselves so that they could construct a literal kingdom of God in preparation for Jesus Christ's imminent Second Coming when Earth would be transformed, and the Church members would be glorified. They felt that non-members got in the way.

Nevertheless, in an effort to prepare for the Second Coming, in accordance with Joseph Smith's revelations, the Latter-Day Saints constructed temples in which sacred rites would be conducted. These temples have been likened to pearly white Disney castles with their mansard roofs and crenelated towers. They are dramatically different from the small ward meetinghouses where Saints worship during the week. This sanctification is due to the religious rituals that occur inside the temple walls. Without these rituals, no persons would be prepared to meet their Heavenly Father in life after death.

With the completion of the Continental Railroad in 1869, which brought Utah territory into the fabric of modern United States culture, Brigham Young and Latter-Day Saints worried about whether or not their Zion could "hold its own place as an alternative to the worldly Babylon if the territory and the nation were yoked together by a growing transportation system."⁵ With this further incorporation into the United States government, the Latter-Day Saints feared

⁵McDannell, Colleen. *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.p.13

that their semi-autonomy was at stake. At this time, Utah moved from its communistic, trade-based economy to a cash-based economy, which threatened the culture of modesty that the Church enjoyed. In 1872, President Brigham Young complained that an emerging class system was impeding the dream of a society in which all believers shared in God's blessings. Introduced to the allure of big business and laissez-faire capitalism, many Latter-Day Saints grew disinterested in the constant work and incessant sharing that was characteristic of their religion.

Beyond economic and class issues, the demographics in Utah territory also threatened Latter-Day Saint dominance. Between 1860 and 1890, the percentage of Saints in the territory dropped from 88 to 66%. Yet, as will be discussed later in this paper, in 1890, when the Church outlawed polygamy, the once horrible relationship between the United States government and the Church improved tremendously, and Church members relinquished control in Utah. Latter-Day Saints have served as leaders in Congress, and about 80% of lawmakers in Utah are members of the Church.

Today, about 62% of citizens in Utah are members of the Church. The Church has grown considerably throughout the world, with 15 million global citizens belonging to the Church. There are 168 official temples worldwide, and 43 more are projected to open within the decade. Still, the highest concentration of the Latter-Day Saints exists in the western states of the United States.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world. As it grows, the Church's desire to remain separate from greater society has shifted to a desire to gain converts. One aspect of the Church that is particularly attractive to new converts is its ability to detail where exactly humanity came from and where it is going. Through a piece

of doctrine known as the Plan of Salvation, the Latter-Day Saint theology details precisely where people come from and where they will go once they die. The Plan of Salvation is at the center of Latter-Day Saint theology and therefore at the center of family life as well.

Section 1: Plan of Salvation

“I was raised to believe in a spirit world, that life exists before the earth and will continue to exist afterward, that each human being, bird, and bulrush, along with all other life forms had a spirit life before it came to dwell physically on the earth.” -Mary Tempest Williams, *Refuge*

The young woman begins her journey at the starting line of the running track, prior to her birth. As she begins her mortal existence, she will move forward on the track. Within the course of her human life she will travel around the entire track and return to the starting line by the time of her death. Standing at the starting line, sending her off, and then greeting her upon her return, is her Heavenly Father and her Savior Jesus Christ, the two most crucial personages to her journey. Accompanying the young woman along her journey, is her family. Without them, she would be unable to return to her Heavenly Father and her Savior. The young woman’s circular journey is known as the Plan of Salvation.⁶ This Latter-Day Saint doctrine is a plan created by Heavenly Father and delivered to Joseph Smith through revelation, that maps out the trajectory of human existence. It is Heavenly Father’s plan for humanity to grow in spiritual perfection through a human existence and ultimately return to Him. The Church understands that humanity

⁶The Plan of Salvation is outlined in many diverse sources. The pages that follow from my reading of Morgan, J. J. *The Plan of Salvation*. Vol. 1. Chicago: Northern States Mission, 1908. and L. Tom Perry. *Plan of Salvation*, Edited by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015.

existed somewhere before birth, that they will leave that place during their earthly life, and will return at the time of their death. It is an expedition that begins where it ends. It is an expedition that is impossible to complete alone.

The Latter-Day Saint worldview is far from rooted in the here-and-now. When the young woman thinks of her life, she will envision the entire running track, considering both where she came from and where she is headed, which are, of course, the same place. She is simultaneously coming and going. Because of the Plan of Salvation, the young woman is both traveling away from her Heavenly Father and moving toward Him. She is on a journey, coming from a Celestial Kingdom to which she must return. She is accompanied constantly by her family. In fact, it is her relationship with her family that allows her to complete the loop around the running track. It is the young woman's connection with her mother, father, sister, and spouse that travels with her from the Celestial Kingdom, through mortal life, and back to the Celestial Kingdom. Without the accompaniment of her family, salvation, or the return to her Heavenly Father, would not be possible for the young woman.

The Plan of Salvation was conceptualized in the mid-1800s in the wake of the Church's formation. It began with a need to guarantee that family relationships continue after death. Church founder and prophet, Joseph Smith, lost his young brother Alvin, to a misdiagnosed and maltreated illness. Smith was deeply troubled by his brother's untimely death and the threat of their permanent separation. Prior to this experience, Smith had not solidified his own view of life after death and therefore had no conception of where his brother had gone. Growing up during the Second Great Awakening, a Protestant religious revival in the United States, Smith and his family sampled various forms of Christianity and folk magic. Smith did not develop any firm

religious beliefs until he founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This lack of certainty left Smith anxiously worrying about what was to become of his relationship with his brother after death. To find an answer, Smith prayed to his Lord, from whom he had already received revelation. In response, “the Lord gave Joseph Smith a revelation, wherein he saw Alvin in a Celestial Kingdom” where he could dwell with his family and Heavenly Father for eternity.⁷ However, it quickly became clear to Smith that his brother could not remain in the Kingdom because he was not baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He recorded that the Lord told him during this revelation that “it was Alvin’s privilege to be there, but he could not remain there without baptism.... The Lord said all who, had they lived with the gospel..., they will be candidates for Celestial Glory.”⁸ Smith interpreted this revelation to mean that all people who are baptized into the Church, and accept what Latter-Day Saints believe to be Jesus Christ’s restored Church, can permanently dwell in the Celestial Kingdom after death. It is in this place that all families will be able to live together forever. Since Smith received this revelation, the idea of a perfect, euphoric kingdom, where families live together, has served as an end goal for Latter-Day Saints.

In reaction to this revelation, Joseph Smith built and shared with his Church a greater storyline of human existence. He learned from his revelation that prior to being born into the mortal, material world, all people lived with their Heavenly Father in the highest of three realms of glory. The highest is known as the Celestial Kingdom, followed by the Terrestrial Kingdom and the Telestial Kingdom. At this point, people were not humans, but rather fleshless spirit beings. Our young woman, who we are following throughout this paper, was once among these

⁷Ballard, Melvin Joseph. *Three Degrees of Glory*. 1 Vol. Ogden, Utah: Mount Ogden Stake Genealogical Committee, 1922. p.25

⁸Ballard, Melvin Joseph. *Three Degrees of Glory*. 1 Vol. Ogden, Utah: Mount Ogden Stake Genealogical Committee, 1922.p. 25

spirit beings. She did not live with her family. Instead, her Heavenly Father was the head of the large family of which all spirit beings were a part. She cared for all of her spirit brothers and sisters and relied on Heavenly Father to guide her. Though she and her spirit siblings were considered favorably by their Heavenly Father, they were inferior to Him, lacking His total goodness and absolute divinity. These were not His peers, but His children, of the same divine ‘stuff’ as Himself, but not as far along in their maturation.

During the pre-existence, Heavenly Father taught the young woman and all other spirit children His principles and commandments that led to utter happiness and goodness. Although His teachings helped the spirits to grow in intelligence, they could never be perfect like their Heavenly Father. Therefore, Heavenly Father developed and taught His spirit children a Plan of Salvation that would allow them to grow in spiritual perfection, through the endurance of humanly trials, and return to Him spiritually stronger than how they left. As Heavenly Father was crafting the Plan of Salvation, He used two of the young woman’s spirit brothers and sisters, Adam and Eve, as a litmus test. They were the first to receive human life. They were first man and woman, but also first relationship, a model for all future pairings of men and women that would endure Heavenly Father’s plan together. Heavenly Father allowed Adam and Eve to dwell in the Garden of Eden, still in His presence, and still blissfully ignorant of the distinction between good and evil. Without the responsibility of this knowledge, the two could depend on Him instead of each other. What Heavenly Father did give Adam and Eve was free agency or the freedom to choose. His only rule was that they could not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If the first couple could obey this commandment, they could remain in the Garden, and all of their spirit brothers and sisters would join them. There would be no need for

families, as all spirit beings would still be in the presence of Heavenly Father. However, Adam and Eve did eat the forbidden fruit from the tree. Because of their decision, they were separated from God, physically and spiritually, banished from the Garden of Eden, and subject to sin and death. Thus, Heavenly Father decided that the Plan of Salvation would entail separation from Him during human life. Yet during this separation, man and woman would not be separated from each other. Heavenly Father decided to keep families together so that they could walk the road back to the Celestial Kingdom together. Adam and Eve's separation from Heavenly Father became known as the Fall, and it acted as the catalyst for the solidified Plan of Salvation that families must follow today. The separation between Heavenly Father and His children became central to the Plan of Salvation. Life experiences, both joyful and sorrowful, can now be utilized to help one distinguish between good and evil. Humanity now has the opportunity to choose good over evil through their own free agency, and without Heavenly Father's influence. It is by consistently choosing good, that a person can mature spiritually. Heavenly Father wants His children to find their way back to Him out of their own volition so that they might grow in wisdom and character.

One particularly good spirit child, Jesus Christ was selected by His Heavenly Father to be the Savior for His brothers and sisters in response to the Fall. He would set the standard for a life of choosing good over evil. With this selection, Heavenly Father granted Jesus divinity. After Adam and Eve made sinful behavior possible, it became necessary to have one being atone for the wrongdoing of all humanity. Heavenly Father taught that by following Christ, one could overcome the effects of one's wrong choices and grow in one's spiritual perfection. Christ would lead his spirit siblings through the material world, guiding them through earthly tests of their

obedience. Choosing righteousness is possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Christ's willingness to die for the sins of humanity, which started with Adam and Eve, enabled Heavenly Father's children to overcome the effects of the Fall and to have joy in both this life and eternity. Jesus is considered the Savior of Heavenly Father's children because He takes away sin and ushers in goodness and perfection. He is not married because He is the glue that holds all families together. He is a part of all earthly families rather than having His own. After the Fall, and once the Plan of Salvation was enacted, Christ and the family, continued as each spirit child's only remnant of their pre-existent life.

The young woman and most of her spirit siblings enthusiastically accepted the challenge of using their own agency to follow Jesus Christ in order to bring their family back to Heavenly Father and the Celestial Kingdom. However, one spirit child, Lucifer, rejected the plan, suggesting that Heavenly Father allow His children to remain spiritually stagnant within the Celestial Kingdom. He wanted to deny his spirit brothers and sisters the opportunity to gain free agency and greater perfection. Lucifer was fearful that free agency would allow Heavenly Father's children to make grave mistakes and fall further away from glory. He wanted all of his siblings to remain in the spirit world, away from the trials of earthly life forever. Lucifer's refusal erupted into a cosmic battle between himself and Heavenly Father. He was supported by a small group of spirit children who also did not want to try to grow in their perfection on earth. Lucifer and his supporters lost the war. As punishment, Heavenly Father cast them away to a 'spirit prison' that is separate from the three realms of glory. To this day, embittered and angry, Lucifer and his cohort act as evil tempters of human beings. Their hope is to draw as many people into their spirit prison so that they will never meet their Heavenly Father again.

Having championed the Plan of Salvation, the young woman and her spirit siblings passed through a ‘veil of forgetfulness’⁹ at birth, causing them to lose the memory of their pre-existent life and enforce their separation from Heavenly Father. By forgetting her previous spiritual life, the young woman will have to rely on her free agency, and her connection to her family, to draw her back to the Celestial Kingdom. Prior to passing through this veil, the young woman actively and willfully agreed to have particular spirit siblings as her human family members. In the wake of Adam and Eve’s togetherness, Heavenly Father taught that the family would guide one another back to His kingdom. The young woman’s family is eternal. Just as Joseph Smith saw his brother in the same kingdom to which he was headed, she will be reunited with her loved ones in Celestial Glory after death. Her earthly mother, father, spouse, and children will remain hers forever. While on earth, the young woman will rely on her family to walk with her around the running track, back toward her Heavenly Father. As she travels forward, the young woman and her family will mature spiritually by engaging in the rituals of the Church that seek both to worship and emulate Christ and to seal themselves closer to each other. The more Christ-like they become, and the closer their bond is, the closer they will travel toward the Celestial Kingdom.

It is believed that when Joseph Smith established the Church, he restored the priesthood to men. The priesthood, first granted to Adam, Jesus’ apostles, and now all Latter-Day Saint men, is the power to grant blessings on behalf of Heavenly Father. The most common use of the priesthood ordinance is to seal, or bind two beings together for eternity. Sealing rituals include baptism, in which the individual is sealed to the Church for eternity, marriage, in which a couple is sealed together forever, and child sealing, in which children are sealed to their parents.

⁹Richards, LeGrand. *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Books, 1950.

Through the restoration of the priesthood, which aids humanity in establishing eternal relationships, Latter-Day Saints understood that Heavenly Father was asking them to utilize their familial relationships as a way to bind themselves to the Celestial Kingdom.

In essence, Adam and Eve established the legacy of the salvific power of the family. Adam, as the first priesthood holder, was the first to be sealed to another person for eternity after being banished from the Garden of Eden. Since humanity's subsequent separation from Heavenly Father, and their passage through the veil of forgetfulness, they only had one another as a remnant from their previous life in the Celestial Kingdom. Through the priesthood power to seal two previous inhabitants of the Celestial Kingdom to one another, humans can bind themselves also to their memory of the Celestial Kingdom, and therefore find their way back to Heavenly Father.

Smith also passed down through generations the ability for one man, the leader of the Church, to be a prophet of Heavenly Father, receiving revelation and teaching Church members His Word. This man's connection to Heavenly Father makes the priesthood possible. Jesus Christ, and the lineage of prophets of His restored Church, lead all of Heavenly Father's children back to the Celestial Kingdom by providing teachings and guidance that align with the will of God, and by distributing the salvific and binding power of the priesthood to all worthy men. The young woman, as she moves forward on the running track, will heed the teachings of the prophets, apostles, and priesthood holders.

She will follow the teachings of these men throughout her life, constantly moving toward and anticipating her own death, when she will return to her Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus Christ in the Celestial Kingdom. Then, at the time of the Second Coming, when Jesus returns to

the earth, and all Heavenly Father's spirit children are called back to Him, each child of Heavenly Father will undergo the final judgment, being reviewed for faithfulness and the ability to live in accordance with God's will. To obey God's will, each person is expected to engage with the priesthood by receiving sacred sealings that bind the family together for eternity. The acceptance of sealings is the metric by which righteousness is measured. Those who were able to live with any degree of righteousness will be welcomed into one of the three realms of eternal glory: the Telestial Kingdom¹⁰ (for those who continuously sin and do not repent until they meet Christ at the Second Coming), the Terrestrial Kingdom (for those who refuse to accept the gospel of the Church, but who live honorable lives), and the Celestial Kingdom (for those who live according to the gospel of Jesus Christ and have accepted the priesthood blessings of baptismal and marital sealing). Only those who enter the Celestial Kingdom are able to keep their familial connections intact as well as be reunited with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. This is the finish line that the young woman will keep in mind as she travels around the running track.

It is Heavenly Father's ultimate wish that all individuals reunite with their earthly families in the Celestial Kingdom. However, in the words of Apostle Melvin J. Ballard, in order to reach the Celestial Kingdom, "a man must enter into...the new and everlasting covenant of marriage....Those who deny endless increase [through childrearing] cannot" live with Heavenly Father in the Celestial Kingdom.¹¹ Because Heavenly Father restored His power to earth through the priesthood, which is utilized to create eternal relationships, obedience to God is demonstrated by an engagement with these relationships. When Heavenly Father sent Adam and Eve away from Him, the one tool he left them was their togetherness. To utilize this tool through the

¹⁰This is a neologism, or new word, developed by Joseph Smith in 1835 when he wrote the Doctrine and Covenants.

¹¹Ballard, Melvin Joseph. *Three Degrees of Glory*. 1 Vol. Ogden, Utah: Mount Ogden Stake Genealogical Committee, 1922.p.12-13

building of family relationships is to exhibit faith in Heavenly Father. The young woman will learn that to be sealed to her family is the most crucial step she will take in moving toward the Celestial Kingdom. It is perhaps the only way to guarantee that she will be reunited with her Heavenly Father.

The Latter-Day Saints' Heavenly Father seems to expect that all His children will marry and have children, creating more opportunities for His spirit children to travel together back to His kingdom. This presumption drives Latter-Day Saints to prioritize family rearing during their material life. As more spirit children are brought into the material world, and taught Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation, more spirit beings will make it back to the Celestial Kingdom. Starting with the legacy established by Adam and Eve, each family acts as a guide to one another throughout the material life. Familial relationships allow human beings to mature together as they encourage righteousness from one another through engagement in priesthood sealings. These sealings are what bless humanity with ability to grow in spiritual perfection. Because all members of the family were together in the Celestial Kingdom during the pre-existent life, it is part of Heavenly Father's plan that they will remain together upon their return to Him. To break their eternal bond is to sever the original identity as Heavenly Father's spirit children.

In summary, the young Latter-Day Saint woman will begin her life journey on the starting line of the running track. She will be a spirit child, dwelling with her Heavenly Father. Then, she will cross the starting line, passing through the veil of forgetfulness, and make her way around the track, guided by Christ and the Church leaders, and accompanied by her family. Her goal is to remain faithful to Heavenly Father as she moves around the track so that she might

make her way back to where she started. None of this is possible without her family, who was with her before her human life began and will hopefully remain with her after it ends.

Section 2: Marriage and the Family

“Establishing relationships and loving people works. Latter-Day Saints do it well.” -Lynn K. Wilder, *Unveiling Grace*

To be a Latter-Day Saint is to believe that one is never without one’s family. In fact, to move toward salvation it is absolutely necessary to be a part of a family. From the time of birth, the young woman will be taught that her family is everything and that it is the key to moving around the track. Without her family, she cannot return to where she started: with Christ and her Heavenly Father.

Because participation in the nuclear family is essential to ensuring one’s place in the Celestial Kingdom, family life is highly regulated by the Church. The Prophet, First Presidency, and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the three highest tiers of Church authority, deliver strict regulations on family life in an effort to securely usher all members toward the Celestial Kingdom. In 1995, prior to the young woman’s birth, the First Presidency of the Church issued “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” which defined its official position on family, marriage, gender, and sexuality. These issues are deeply intertwined and cannot be separated. Each piece of the family puzzle must fit together exactly right, with each person playing exactly the right role, for the familial unit to be salvific. One’s gender and sexuality must be aligned perfectly with the Church’s teaching or one cannot be saved through sealings. The proclamation

begins by stating that “marriage between a man and woman is ordained by God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”¹² The Proclamation warns that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”¹³ With this proclamation it became clear that family values are not cultivated in the home, but rather in the Church. The familial and the relational aspects of Latter-Day Saint life is not personal, nor cultural, but purely religious.

On the local level, laymen with priesthood authority act as the mouthpiece for Church authorities, delivering teachings and running meetings at the local wards, or meetinghouses. When the young woman, attends events at her local ward, or meetinghouse, she will learn from priesthood holders the specific functions of family life and how to participate in it. They will provide her with spiritual guidelines on how to behave in regard to matters of sexuality, gender, marriage, and childrearing. On Sundays, various men who are ordained with the priesthood will stand at the pulpit and teach about what the scripture commands in regard to family. The young woman will be taught prayers that are centered around family life. She will also learn that if she fails to properly participate in family life, she risks being alienated from her loved ones and her Heavenly Father after death. From a very young age, there will be no question in her mind that a well-structured, traditional family, is absolutely essential to exaltation, or spiritual advancement toward Heavenly Father.

Perhaps the most important teaching of the Church is that all people should marry and have children with their spouses. Marriages that take place in the temple, where couples can be

¹²*Family: A Proclamation to the World.* (1995, November). Ensign,25.p.102

¹³This is referring to natural disasters and a lifetime of suffering as is mentioned in the Bible and other works of scripture.

sealed together for eternity, are among the Church's most sacred rites. As a result, Latter-Day Saints are more likely than not to be married. Over the age of thirty, Latter-Day Saints are three times as likely to be married as Catholics, twice as likely as Protestants, and four times as likely as those with no religion. Furthermore, only 20% of Latter-Day Saint temple marriages end in divorce. It is likely that the ideal of an eternal sealing, or the Church doctrine that marriage lasts forever, leads to more marriages and lower divorce rates. Latter-Day Saint scriptures state that unlike marriages that last only "til death do you part," temple sealings ensure that death cannot separate loved ones.

As previously discussed, the priesthood allows Latter-Day Saint men to perform salvific, binding acts with the power of Heavenly Father. Once sealed, married couples are expected to have children. Childrearing is essential because it allows for more beings to enter into eternal connections through sealing rituals, thus ushering more people toward the Celestial Kingdom. In other words, when a Latter-Day Saint couple has children, their children will also be sealed to one another, ensuring that they will be able to return to Heavenly Father. The theological foundation of marital sealings and childrearing illuminate why these rites have salvific power:

The [Latter-Day Saint] doctrines of pre-mortal existence and the post-mortal continuation of identity directly dictates family life. Because the highest degree of resurrected glory is reserved for married couples who will continue their role as parents by creating spirit children, a temple marriage becomes a major and irreplaceable factor in an eternal future. Family life is the mechanism for bringing pre-mortal spirits to earth and the training and proving ground to qualify parents for their post-mortal roles...In having and rearing children, parents participate with God in furthering the development of pre-mortal spirits and gain experiences in preparation for their own role as eternal parents. The family is the divinely ordained organization designed for the reproduction and socialization of children. Any other institution is an inferior substitute, and couples who avoid having children are missing a key aspect of their own religious and spiritual development.¹⁴

¹⁴Heaton, Tim B. "Demographics of the Contemporary Mormon Family." *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* (1/1/86, 1986).p.108-10.

The cosmological value of childrearing, which emphasizes bringing more spirit beings onto the running track so that they might move toward spiritual maturation, has led Church authorities to oppose same-sex marriage. Homosexuality has been an enemy of the Church from the religion's beginning, through the delivery of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World", until the most recent half-decade. In November of 2015, the Church established a policy that labeled Latter-Day Saints in same-sex marriages as apostates. It also "prohibited the children of same-sex couples from being baptized or receiving other ordinances."¹⁵ As a child, the young woman will be led to believe that homosexual relationships are sinful and directly at odds with Heavenly Father's will.

Then, two years later, based on divine revelation, the Church's prophet, Russell M. Nelson announced that simply identifying as homosexual would no longer qualify as apostasy. Instead, a member would need to act on one's attraction in order to be excommunicated from the Church. Still, at this point, the young woman and her peers would have developed a solid view of homosexuality as 'wrong'. Nelson upheld the standard that "sexual relations are proper only between a man and woman who are legally and lawfully wedded as husband and wife. Any other sexual relations, including those between persons of the same gender, are sinful and undermine the divinely created institution of the family."¹⁶

The young woman will likely view her parents' decision to have a temple marriage and bear children as a religious choice. Their family planning was influenced by the belief that families are the key to the Celestial Kingdom. Marriage is salvific in that one cannot make it to

¹⁵Cook, Bryce. "What Do We Know Of God's Will for His LGBT Children: An Examination of the LDS Church's Position on Homosexuality." *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 2 (7/2017, 2017): 1-54.p.2

¹⁶Cook, Bryce. "What Do We Know Of God's Will for His LGBT Children: An Examination of the LDS Church's Position on Homosexuality." *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* 50, no. 2 (7/2017, 2017): 1-54.p.4

the Celestial Kingdom without a spouse of the opposite gender. Having children is essential in that it fulfills Heavenly Father's desire to send all of His spirit children to earth so that they might grow in perfection. Thus, the bonds of family are not just social, but spiritual. Still, there are temporal qualities and dynamics within a family that the Church expects its members to uphold.

The Proclamation of the Family is very specific about gender dynamics within a marriage. It describes gender distinctions as “essential characteristics of an individual’s identity and purpose.”¹⁷ The gender divide exists as such:

Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.¹⁸

Most Church members believe that women should be homemakers and men should be breadwinners. Tim B. Heaton, a professor of sociology at Brigham Young University found that Latter-Day Saint “men reportedly have more decision-making authority than women even in tasks where women are expected to take on more responsibility, like taking care of the house and caring for the children.”¹⁹ He also found that active members of the Church held less egalitarian views of the household division of labor than people who were not religious.

This patriarchal way of thinking is driven by the Church's theology. It is taught that because they hold the priesthood, men are designated spiritual leaders and heads of their

¹⁷The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Intellectual Reserve Inc. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng> (accessed 5/5/2020, 2020).

¹⁸The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Intellectual Reserve Inc. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng> (accessed 5/5/2020, 2020).

¹⁹Heaton, Tim B. "Demographics of the Contemporary Mormon Family." *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* (1/1/86, 1986).p.108

households. The priesthood gives men administrative power not only in the Church but also in the household. However, there are also aspects of Latter-Day Saint theology that are egalitarian in regard to gender. For instance, in temple marriages, the man and woman are both granted into an order of the priesthood through the covenant of marriage. Both husband and wife are given identical promises of “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions” in life after death.²⁰ Thus, marriage grants women the opportunity to access the priesthood. Still, the woman cannot access this blessing without a husband, while a man can attain it independently. As the young woman observes her parents’ marriage, she will realize that her only way to ensure the deep connection with Heavenly Father that the priesthood allows, is through a husband. Furthermore, because marriage is necessary for exaltation, she will be constantly reminded throughout her life that eternal marriage is what binds her to eternal life with her Heavenly Father.

Describing the marriage rite itself is difficult because it is rooted within a complex temple liturgy, whose content is unknowable, except by priesthood holders. However, records of Joseph Smith performing weddings during the Church’s early stages illuminate valuable details about the sacred nature of Latter-Day Saint marriage.

In these records, it is shown how Latter-Day Saints reject Christianity’s understanding of marriage as a defense against carnality. The medieval Christian Church required members to either marry or become ordained, until the Protestant Reformation in 1517, when it was suggested that celibacy was unnecessary as our earthly ties will not remain in the heavenly realm. In other words, Protestants considered marriage to be temporal, not eternal. Nevertheless,

²⁰Smith, Joseph. *Doctrine and Covenants*. 132: Marriage; an Eternal Covenant., edited by Joseph Smith. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1835.

both before the Protestant Reformation and after, marriage was meant for this world, not the world to come. This is not the case for Latter-Day Saints, who began practicing their particular form of marriage in the mid-1800s. They considered marriage to be central to their priesthood's restoration on this earth, in that the power to eternally bind one man and one woman together forever, was at the core of Heavenly Father's wish for humanity. Marriage does not end with death, but rather continues on to the Celestial Kingdom. It is a part of Heavenly Father's eternal, predetermined purpose for humankind, not merely a temporal byproduct of life on earth. To be married to one's particular spouse is to fulfill the plan of God. This notion relies on a Latter-Day Saint couple's promise "to be each other's companion, and uphold the duties of husband and wife in all respects, henceforth and forever."²¹

Heavenly Father revealed to Joseph Smith that eternal marriage is an institution of heaven, first established between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden through the authority of the everlasting priesthood. When Adam and Eve fell from their Heavenly Father, their togetherness was all that they had to find their way back to Him. It is through this event that marriage became vital to salvation. With this knowledge, Smith taught that marriage was more than a social function-- it granted immortality and eternal life. He wrote in the scriptures that persons who kept the covenant of marriage would become holy in the next life, and those who did not would be deficient.

Although our young woman has learned that marriage, and the proper engagement within it, is vital to her moving forward toward the Celestial Kingdom, her experience would not have been the same had she lived at the Church's beginning. What has married life been for

²¹Flake, Kathleen. "The Development of Early Latter-Day Saint Marriage Rites, 1831-53." *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (01/2015, 2015): 77-102.p.82

Latter-Day Saint women throughout history? The answer to this question has evolved throughout time, but at the beginning, women were asked to make major sacrifices in order to ensure their own, their husbands', and their sister wives' salvation.

Beginning in the mid-1800s, the Church practiced polygamy, much to the chagrin of the United States Government. For years the Latter-Day Saints fought with the government for freedom to practice polygamy, and struggled against assimilation with greater American culture. Non-Latter-Day Saints were critical of all aspects of the religion, but what truly astonished them was the practice of plural marriage. The majority of the American people found polygamy, which the Church considered divinely inspired, to be un-American, immoral, and frankly barbaric. Nevertheless, Latter-Day Saints believed the practice to be a divine commandment of their Heavenly Father's.

Even today, members of the Church do not understand all of Heavenly Father's reasons for instituting, through the prophet Joseph Smith, the practice of plural marriage during the 19th century. However, what they do look to is the Book of Mormon's call for people to bring large numbers of children into the gospel covenant in order to "raise up seed unto the Lord."²² Otherwise, the theology behind polygamy is a mystery even to the Latter-Day Saints themselves. Church members simply took it as truth that Joseph Smith had received revelation from Heavenly Father in 1835, telling him to take multiple wives. Within this revelation:

God reminded Smith of the social structure of the ancient world. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, had given her handmaid to her husband to wed when she herself had not borne children. King David also received many wives and concubines, as did Solomon and Moses.²³

²²The Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:30

²³Daynes, Kathryn M., *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.p, 208–9

Thus, Heavenly Father directed Joseph Smith to sanctify plural marriage within the Church, in an effort to allow each man to have more children, whose membership in the Church would grant them salvation.

By the 1880s, around 25 percent of Latter-Day Saints lived in plural marriages. In response, the United States government worked to rid the nation of polygamy, labeling it as harmful to the rights and liberties of women and children. Critics of polygamy asserted that men, who are in low supply and high demand in polygamous relationships, can exert greater control over their wives. Furthermore, polygamous family dynamics foster jealousy and conflict among co-wives. Children also seem to receive less nurturance from their fathers as “men with many wives and children are spread too thin, and...are compiling resources to attract their next wives instead of working to support their existing family.”²⁴ Historian Colleen McDannell wrote that in “1856, the Republican Party platform termed polygamy and slavery ‘the twin relics of barbarism.’”²⁵ According to this logic, just as Africans had been unjustly enslaved, so too were white women imprisoned by Latter-Day Saint men. Still, despite the nation’s disapproval, in “1870 five thousand Latter-Day Saint women gathered in Salt Lake City to rally against proposed anti-polygamist legislation.”²⁶

Then, the federal government enforced the Morill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, criminalizing plural marriage and limiting Church wealth, as well as the Cullom Bill in 1870, which called for greater federal control of Utah territory, became vigorously enforced. Yet the

²⁴Copeland, Libby. “Is Polygamy Really So Awful?” *Slate*, 1/30/2012, p.1

²⁵McDannell, Colleen. *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.p.45

²⁶Alexander, Thomas G., *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).p. 60–73

most disarming attack the U.S. government made against Latter-Day Saints came with the ratification of the Edmunds Tucker Act in 1887, which:

disincorporated the church and the fund that it used to bring converts to Utah. No longer would the church be able to own mines, farms, or factories. The federal government seized all church property valued over \$50,000...[and] required couples to secure civil marriage licenses, prohibiting children of plural marriages from inheriting property.²⁷

As a result of this legislation, Latter-Day Saint women became the heads of their homes, farms, and businesses, as their husbands had to go into hiding. Financial struggles, loneliness, secrecy, disappointment, prosecution, and imprisonment all tested the endurance of the Saints. They feared that:

the next anti-polygamy law would take away the vote from all men, not just those who participated in plural marriages. At that point, with all Latter-Day Saints unable to vote or hold public office and with Church finances in ruin, the Utah territory would be fully under the control of non-Latter-Day Saints. Perhaps the Gentiles would even take over the temples.²⁸

Thus, in 1890, the same year that the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that laws against polygamy did not conflict with religious freedom, Church president Wilford Woodruff ended the religious sanctification of plural marriage with his Woodruff Manifesto. Still, after this manifesto, many members continued to live within their plural marriages. In reaction, the Church issued a Second Manifesto in 1904 that promised to excommunicate any members who still practiced polygamy.

Today polygamy continues to be a reality in Latter-Day Saint fundamentalist groups, the largest of which is known as the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). The group has 9000 members and exists primarily in Colorado City and on the Utah-Arizona border. The

²⁷Vile, John R. *Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. United States* (1890). The First Amendment Encyclopedia; <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/171/late-corporation-of-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-v-united-states>

²⁸Talbot, Christine. *A Foreign Kingdom: Mormons and Polygamy in American Political Culture, 1852-1890*. Vol. 1 University of Illinois Press, 2013.

group also has members in Eldorado, Texas, and in South Dakota, Nevada, British Columbia, and Mexico. Within the FLDS community, men will legally marry one woman and then take several other wives in religious sealing ceremonies. Although the marriages are not civilly recognized, they are thought to be celestially significant. The FLDS church teaches that “men require three or more wives to enter into the highest level of heaven in the afterlife” and that “obedient participation in a polygamous marriage and bearing as many children as possible are the requirements deemed necessary for women to enter into the highest level of heaven.”²⁹ Furthermore, because the group believes that marital partners are decided not by the participants, but by a prophet who receives revelations from Heavenly Father, polygamy operates as a system of arranged marriages, in which leaders can reward or punish men in the community by assigning or denying them wives. Critics have found that many underage females are forced into marriages against their will. Currently, the FLDS leader Warren Jeffs is “sentenced to life in prison for sexual assault of a child under age 14.”³⁰

The official Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints does not recognize the FLDS as legitimate. Here, there exists a schism, which occurs in many churches when there is a disagreement over fundamental questions that are at the crux of the group’s teaching. For instance, in the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church experienced a schism over papal authority. The power of the Pope is at the epicenter of both churches’ teachings. It is so instrumental, that to compromise on the issue would be to undermine the whole religion. For Latter-Day Saints, the proper engagement with the rite of marriage is the

²⁹Quek, Kaye. “Fundamentalist Mormon Polygamy and the Traffic in Women.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* (13 July 2016, 2016), p.25-33

³⁰“FLDS Fast Facts.” <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/31/us/fundamentalist-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints-fast-facts/index.html> (accessed 4/12/2020).

religion's most sacred practice. Married life is the very essence of the entire faith. Theologically, monogamy and polygamy serve different purposes. The former mirrors the partnership, devotion, and loyalty of Adam and Eve whereas the latter stresses bringing an abundance of God's children into this world. Over time, and with the influence of American secular society, Latter-Day Saints have prioritized the honoring of Adam and Eve's partnership through monogamy. Still, there are many fundamentalists who believe in the theology of polygamy over monogamy. Therefore, a schism has occurred over this question because correct marital practices determine the religion's entire vitality.

In February of 2020, the Utah legislature ratified a bill that greatly reduces the penalty for polygamous marriage between consenting adults. The state's governor supports this bill, which would knock the penalty for consensual polygamy down from a felony to an infraction -- the equivalent of a traffic ticket. The sponsor of the bill, "Republican senator Deirdre Henderson, says prosecutors tell her the current law is difficult to enforce and rarely is. She also says it deters abuse victims from going to the police."³¹ About 30,000 Utah citizens live in polygamous communities, many of which are abusive. It has been reported that when anti-polygamy laws were vigorously enforced in the mid-twentieth century, it did not deter the practice, but instead drove polygamous families into hiding. This proved ultimately to be more dangerous for the women and children of these families. Essentially, "branding all polygamists as felons has facilitated abuse, not eliminated polygamy."³²

³¹Kelly, Mary L. *Utah Government Poised to Decriminalize Polygamy*.
<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/27/810095467/utah-government-poised-to-decriminalize-polygamy> (accessed 3/16/2020, 2020).

³²Romo, Venessa. *Utah Bill Decriminalizing Polygamy Clears First Hurdle*.
<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/12/805455196/utah-bill-decriminalizing-polygamy-clears-first-hurdle-moves-to-state-senate> (accessed 3/16/20, 2020).

On the other hand, advocates for victims of polygamy oppose the decriminalization bill because they fear it will protect abusers, pedophiles, and traffickers. For instance, an anti-polygamy organization known as Sound Choice Coalition issued a statement saying:

[Latter-Day Saint] polygamy is NOT A CHOICE, as fundamentalists would like you to believe....Offenders use Section 132 [of the LDS scripture called *the Doctrine and Covenants*] to justify crimes and deviant behaviors; to subvert and oppress their wives and their numerous offspring who have been indoctrinated from birth into believing that a loving God commanded such suffering and disparity....To make this an infraction, [The Utah legislature] is essentially saying this an O.K lifestyle.³³

As of now, the State Senate and House have both passed the bill. It will now be sent back to the Senate for approval before the governor will sign it.

It is impossible to explore Latter-Day Saint familial traditions without acknowledging its history of polygamy. As the Church developed, it struggled to find the proper way to practice its most important rite: marriage. Polygamy, for Latter-Day Saints, was a mistake along the way toward restoring Christ's Church upon the Earth. However, for fundamentalists, the mistake was in leaving polygamy behind.

Though polygamy is no longer supported by the institution, its leaders kept in place a marriage structure in which the husband holds the priesthood, and thus the power, and the wife does not. The male-dominated power dynamic which began with polygamy, and continues today, exists in the fact that women cannot be saved without marriage. Through marriage, a woman is sealed into the priesthood, which links man to Heavenly Father. Modern, monogamous marriage continues to be about salvation, which is impossible without a connection to the priesthood. Therefore, it is still an institution that allows men to be dominant.

³³Romo, Venessa. *Utah Bill Decriminalizing Polygamy Clears First Hurdle*. <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/12/805455196/utah-bill-decriminalizing-polygamy-clears-first-hurdle-moves-to-state-senate> (accessed 3/16/20, 2020).

In the late 1800s, Smith was also preaching that Latter-Day Saints were not meant to simply marry, but to marry and have children who would be sealed to them for eternity. He proclaimed that marriage between man and woman is essential to Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation, in part because children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be raised by a father and mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Smith taught that in having children, parents participate with Heavenly Father in furthering the development of pre-mortal spirits. As discussed in regard to the Plan of Salvation, Latter-Day Saints believe that each family has a predestined number of children. Therefore, to prevent oneself from having children would be to deny Heavenly Father's plan. His plan was to create families, not simply married couples. As a result, Latter-Day Saint couples have an abundance of children. Since some of the first Latter-Day Saints settled in Utah territory, their fertility has been above the national average. This is due in part to the fact that Latter-Day Saint "women delay using contraceptives until after the birth of their first child and use contraceptives [only] to space out their children thereafter."³⁴ In other words, Latter-Day Saints use contraception not to prevent pregnancy, but rather to time their pregnancies intentionally.

Whereas national trends demonstrate that higher socioeconomic status is correlated with fewer children, for Church members, the higher the family income, the more children a couple is likely to have. Parents will also be instructed by the Church on the proper way to raise their children. The young woman's parents will follow a pattern of Church-mandated rules as they raise her to grow toward the Celestial Kingdom. For instance, the young woman and her family will engage in a weekly Family Home Evening that the Church requires. The practice began in 1915, when Church leaders "recommended that members arrange monthly (and later, weekly)

³⁴Heaton, Tim B. "Demographics of the Contemporary Mormon Family." *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* (1/1/86, 1986),p.105

‘home evenings’ to strengthen family ties.”³⁵ Each week, the young woman and her family will set apart a day to honor the sacred nature of the family through hymn singing, scripture reading, and game playing. In modern times, members have reported that a weekly Family Home Evening helps to combat the “difficulty of maintaining familial closeness as technology and media have hastened the pace of life.”³⁶

Though family closeness and time spent as a family is valued, the Church is an ever-present force in the childrearing process. For instance, a sociological study conducted by Rachel Loser in 2009 found that nearly 100% of the study’s participants reported a strong tie between their nuclear family and their Church community. Many participants shared the sentiment that religion and family life were interconnected so much so that one could not think about the family without also thinking about the Church or vice versa. In fact, it was a commonly held understanding in Loser’s study that “religions influenced the perceptions of the importance and the purpose of the family.”³⁷

The young woman is no exception to this rule. Even the way her home is decorated will be dictated by her religious beliefs. There will likely be a framed picture of Jesus in her home, as a reminder of who her family must follow toward the Celestial Kingdom. The Church will expect that she and her family pray together before meals, and to sometimes go so far as to actively study scripture during dinner. As indicated by the participants in Loser’s study, the young woman and her family would probably often engage in meal-time conversation that focused on

³⁵Dollahite, David Marks, Loren. “Mormon's Weekly Family Ritual is an Antidote to Fast-Paced Living.” *The Atlantic*, 3/29/2018, 2018, sec. Family.

³⁶Dollahite, David Marks, Loren. “Mormon's Weekly Family Ritual is an Antidote to Fast-Paced Living.” *The Atlantic*, 3/29/2018, 2018, sec. Family.

³⁷Loser, Rachel. “Religion and the Daily Lives of LDS Families: An Ecological Perspective.” *Family and Consumer Science Research Journal* 37, no. 1 (2009). 52-118.p.58-61

the gospel, especially on Sundays, during which many families make an effort to honor the Sabbath day.

It is abundantly clear that the Church emphasizes the family. The most recent General Conference, a biannual meeting of all Church members, emphasized the family more than any other topic. Additionally, the Church-owned Brigham Young University recently changed its curriculum to include a mandatory course on the eternal family. Evidently, the Church expects a universal family experience for every Latter-Day Saint. However, about 20% of adult members are single. Very few of the Church-facilitated conversations about family-life and marriage are inclusive of single adults. In reaction to this issue, a symposium was organized in 2015 by members of the Church living in New York City. The event addressed the experience of single Latter-Day Saints. One of the most prominent topics was the Singles' Wards, congregations organized solely for members who are not married. These wards are exactly like 'regular' family wards in terms of structure, organization, and teachings. However, there is also an emphasis placed on attendees meeting other single people within the ward, so that they can get married. One symposium participant reported that "it would seem that the sole purpose of living and breathing in Singles' Wards is to catch the attention of some other living, breathing person with whom you can spend eternity."³⁸ This experience was said to bring about enormous pressure and forced-bonding. The symposium also uncovered the sad reality that "much of the public acknowledgment of single people in the Church today begins with the notion that they are a problem, that singleness is something to be fixed."³⁹ To be single is to be excluded from the highest realm of heavenly glory. It is also considered to be a failure to do everything that

³⁸Proctor, Mariah. "What is the Purpose of Singles' Ward?" *Meridian Magazine* (9/8/2015).

³⁹Christensen, Clayton Bowman, Matt Harris, Sharron. "Recap of 'of One Body: The State of Mormon Singledom.'" *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* (6/25/2015).

Heavenly Father has asked His children to do. If our young woman were to remain single into adulthood, her movement toward the Celestial Kingdom would be impeded. In fact, she would not make it to her destination.

Without following the strict guidelines of the Church on how to structure a family, Latter-Day Saints have no hope of reaching the Celestial Kingdom. As a result, spirituality and familial relations become one and the same. Members of the Church are told that their relationships have religious significance. As we have seen in this section, marriage and childbearing are dominated by the instructions of Church authorities. In the next section we will see how these authorities raise Latter-Day Saint children, as much as their parents do. This dynamic, in which the Church is a script-writer, and the members are the actors, is necessary if Latter-Day Saints want their stories to end in the Celestial Kingdom.

Section 3: Youth and Education

"The Church is my first language, my mother tongue, my family, my people, my home; it is my heart, my heart, my heart." -Joanna Brooks, *The Book of Mormon Girl: Stories from an American Faith*

Not only does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints dictate the marital and childbearing practices of its members, but it also plays an active role in the raising of young people. Our young woman, as she matures and grows, will be oriented toward religious obedience and commitment to the Church. During her formative years, her lifestyle and worldview will be shaped by the Church as much as it is by her family. Nevertheless, as the

Church educates the young woman and teaches her to be a faithful Latter-Day Saint, it will continuously urge her to keep her family at the front of her mind.

By the age of three, the young woman will be expected to contribute to weekly Sacrament Meetings, or worship gatherings held on Sundays. She will deliver mini-talks and bear her testimony to the congregation as part of the Church's Primary Program. This is the equivalent of Sunday School, that Latter-Day Saint youths participate in until they are six.

At the age of six, the young woman will join the Young Women program, which is entirely separate from the Young Men program, until she is seventeen. Both programs meet after Sacrament Meetings on Sundays and then again during the week, for an activity known as Mutual. The purpose of Mutual is different for boys and girls. For girls, the purpose is to grow in home-making skills. Our young woman will learn to sew, cook, and garden. Spiritually, she will prepare to become worthy to enter the temple as an adult. To be temple worthy is to be able to receive the ordinance of a marriage sealing. Young women make arts and crafts that focus their attention on entering the temple for marriage. In figures A. and B., one will find an example of such crafts.

For boys, the purpose of Mutual is to prepare to be ordained with the Aaronic Priesthood at the age of twelve. This is a stepping stone to the Melchizedek Priesthood, which young men are ordained with at the age of seventeen, allowing them to practice sealings. With the Aaronic Priesthood, young boys are able to serve within their ward as a bishop, priest, teacher, or deacon. They can administer the sacrament of bread and water on Sunday, gather tithings from the congregation, and perform home visits to sick or inactive members. The Aaronic Priesthood is

conferred by the laying on of hands by a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Young girls are not able to be ordained with any priesthood role.

Both the Young Women and Young Men programs prepare girls and boys for family life. For girls, home-making, and preparation for women temple sealings position them to be wives and mothers. For boys, the Aaronic Priesthood is a stepping stone towards being able to create eternal families through the process of sealing. Furthermore, by growing in their leadership within the Church, young boys are also growing in their ability to serve an institution that encourages strong family bonds.

Finally, young men and women's programs merge again at the age of fourteen, and the teens participate in a four-year program known as Seminary. Our young woman and her fellow students will meet every morning before school to study the four bodies of Latter-Day Saint scripture: the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price in a rotating order. The Church considers the purpose of Seminary to be "to help students understand and rely upon the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven."⁴⁰

These intense programs drive great loyalty to the Church among young people. In 2002, the National Survey of Youth and Religion found that 71% of Latter-Day Saint youths attended weekly church services compared to the 40% national average. Latter-Day Saint youths also reported that they would continue to practice their religion even if their parents did not, at a rate of 70% compared to a 40% national average. Such high levels of engagement from young people

⁴⁰The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *The Purpose of Seminary*.
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/si/seminary/about/purpose-of-seminary?lang=eng> (accessed 3/23, 2020).

are what allows the Church to instill its values upon young people. The Church uses the education program to teach young people about sexuality and family values in a way that removes the onus from parents. To a large degree, the Church is very effective in ingraining its standards into the minds of young people. As readers will find in figures C. and D., young members of the Church steep their social media with content that perpetuates the values of their religion. A popular YouTube channel, known as Saints Unscripted, features two young men and one young woman who post videos with titles such as: “Chastity: Sex, Porn, and Masturbation,” “What Mormons Think of Dating in High School,” and “How Can I Defend My Beliefs At School.” On the website Pinterest, Latter-Day Saints post pictures of the temple on their profiles with inspirational quotes from Church authorities underneath. Several ‘influencers’⁴¹ on Instagram post pictures of themselves dressed in their Sunday best, standing in front of the temple or a Sunday meetinghouse, with quotations from the Book of Mormon in their caption. Young members’ display of their religion on social media indicates a genuine buy into the value and lifestyle encouraged by the Church. The identity of a Latter-Day Saint is one that many young people want to put out into the world.

While in Seminary, the young woman will receive a handbook known as “For the Strength of Youth” that addresses dress and appearance, dating, masturbation and pornography, dancing, and sexual purity. The introduction to the booklet, written by the First Presidency, states that “keeping the standards in the booklet will help [teens] to be worthy to attend the temple.”⁴² By reading “For the Strength of Youth”, the young woman will intimately learn about the law of

⁴¹People who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views.

⁴²The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *For the Strength of Youth*. Vol. 1. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2001.

chastity. She will be taught that pre-marital sex is forbidden because sexual intercourse is “ordained by God for the creation of children and for the expression of love within marriage.”⁴³

Within the Book of Mormon, it is taught that “sexual sins are more serious than any other sin except murder and denying the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁴

The Law of Chastity, for Latter-Day Saints, forbids not only sex outside of marriage, but also between two individuals of the same sex. The Church cites that the Bible, particularly the Book of Romans, to claim that these behaviors are contrary to the purpose of human sexuality.⁴⁵ Because Latter-Day Saints view heterosexual marriage and childbearing to be essential steps toward the Celestial Kingdom, they understand homosexual activity to exclude people from the salvific nature of family life. “For the Strength of Youth” also condemns pornography by ordering young people not to “view, read, or listen to anything that depicts or describes the human body or sexual conduct in a way that can arouse sexual feelings.”⁴⁶ In terms of dating and relationships, young people are expected to avoid passionate kissing, lying on top of one another, or touching private parts. In order to avoid impure urges, it is encouraged that young people only go on dates in big groups.

If the young woman were to break the law of chastity, she would be expected to confess her sins to her local bishop, or the leader of her local ward. However, these sorts of conversations have become increasingly controversial in recent years. Many Latter-Day Saints have recently expressed discomfort with an older man sitting “alone in a closed-door conversation with a

⁴³The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Chastity*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/chastity?lang=eng> (accessed 2/25/2020, 2020).

⁴⁴Alma 39:3-5

⁴⁵Romans 1:24-32: “In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.”

⁴⁶The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *For the Strength of Youth*. Vol. 1. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2001.

younger woman, or even a teenage girl, talking about, of all things, sex.”⁴⁷ Annually, children as young as twelve have private meetings with their bishop where they are interviewed about their testimony, church attendance, and adherence to the law of chastity. These meetings entail probing questions about the specific sexual acts that the child engaged in-- questions that many Latter-Day Saints consider to be outrageous.

People are uncomfortable due to the tremendous power differential-- adult to youth, authority to follower, and in some cases, male to female-- which can fuel trauma and shame from a young participant. One woman, interviewed by *The Salt Lake Tribune*, recalled that when she confessed behaving inappropriately with her high school boyfriend, her bishop’s questions grew increasingly intrusive. He began asking her questions such as, “Were you dressed or did you undoclothe?” and “did he reach a climax?”⁴⁸ She also reported that he asked her where she put her hands and where she was touched. Aside from a few unofficial online petitions, there is very little action being taken against these interviews between bishops and young people.

Following the law of chastity, as it is described in “For the Strength of Youth”, is meant to prepare young people for a pure entry into eternal marriage in the temple. Once the young woman has completed Primary, Young Men and Women, and Seminary, she will be ready for the next milestone of growing up within the Church: entering the temple. Latter-Day Saints typically marry in their early twenties, which requires receiving a temple ordinance that prepares one to be sealed to their spouse by the power of the priesthood. Entering the temple is considered the pinnacle of a lifetime within the Latter-Day Saint religion. Starting in the primary program,

⁴⁷Stack, Peggy Fletcher. “Some Parents and Therapists Say Mormon Bishops' Interviews with Children about Sexual Matters are 'Intrusive, Inappropriate'.” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 12/17/2017, 2017, sec. Religion.

⁴⁸Stack, Peggy Fletcher. “Some Parents and Therapists Say Mormon Bishops' Interviews with Children about Sexual Matters are 'Intrusive, Inappropriate'.” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 12/17/2017, 2017, sec. Religion.

children, particularly young girls, sing songs about becoming worthy to go to the temple. The temple is considered so special because it is a place where the three great sealing practices: baptism, martial sealing, and child sealing take place. It is the place where Latter-Day Saints reach forward into eternity.

When the young woman turns eighteen, she will receive a temple recommend, or a physical card which testifies one's "worthiness established in private interviews with their ward leaders."⁴⁹ During her temple recommend interview, the young woman will affirm that she believes in the Church's doctrine, supports its leadership, pays tithings, and behaves honestly and chastely. Once in possession of a temple recommend, she will participate in an initiatory endowment ceremony prior to being married. Our young woman, on her journey toward the Celestial Kingdom, will eventually be sealed to a spouse in the temple, and raise children in her eternal family as well.

As the young Latter-Day Saint woman travels along the first portion of the running track, she is guided by the Church. Essentially every lesson that it teaches her is geared toward the family. Yet, it comes from outside of the family instead of from within. She is raised by the Church as much as she is by her family. Through an education program that takes her from pre-school to her wedding, and literature such as "For the Strength of Youth," Church authorities teach young people family values. By simply participating in Latter-Day Saint religious life, parents can ensure that their children learn standards such as chastity, generosity, hard work, knowledge of the gospel, literacy, and social competency.

This is a Church that is all about the family, and yet it is dictated by an institution. The family is the focal point, and the key to salvation yet the Church has the most sway. In order to

⁴⁹Riess, Jana. *The Next Mormons: How Millennials are Changing the LDS Church*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.p.2

prioritize the family most actively and perfectly one must follow the rules of the Church. The family comes first, but so does the Church.

Section 3 Images

Young Women's Temple Preparedness Craft Projects



Figure A.



Figure B.

Social Media Posts

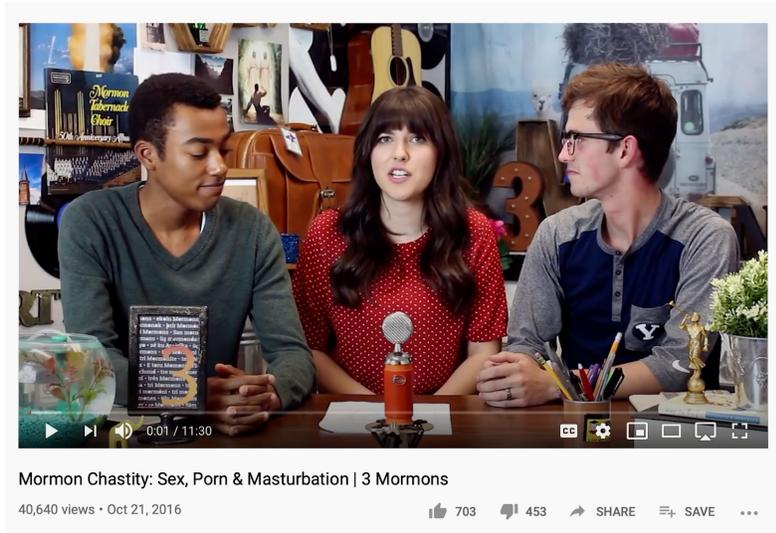


Figure C., Saints Unscripted YouTube Channel.

Instagram Post



Figure D., Temple Marriage⁵⁰

⁵⁰All images are used with the permission of the owners.

Section 4: Apostasy

“How sweet is the assurance, how comforting is the peace that comes from the knowledge that if we marry right and live right, our relationship will continue, notwithstanding the certainty of death and the passage of time.” -Gordon B. Hinckley, former President of the Church

Through its education program, the Church creates a clear script for the young woman to follow in order to live a life that is family-oriented, and thus worthy of the Celestial Kingdom. She has learned through Primary, Young Women, and Seminary, that her eternal connection to those who were with her in her pre-existent life is what will lead her to Heavenly Father. However, as Latter-Day Saints are moving through life toward the Celestial Kingdom, the path, which has previously been illustrated as a running track, proves to be filled with hurdles. There are many opportunities for one to stumble, and to fall further from Heavenly Father, even from within the Church. Oftentimes, the hurdles arise as urges to behave in ways that are not aligned with the Church’s family values. Any time that one chooses not to participate in a family that is worthy of eternal sealing, one is thought to move farther away from Heavenly Father. If the young woman’s words, beliefs, or behaviors strayed from or directly opposed the Church’s doctrine, she would become labeled as an apostate and would be excluded from returning to Heavenly Father after death.

The Church defines apostasy as a situation when individuals or groups of people turn away from the principles of the gospel. It believes that this form of treachery began when:

after the deaths of the Savior and His Apostles, [when] men corrupted the principles of the gospel and made unauthorized changes in Church organizations and priesthood ordinances. Because of this widespread apostasy, the Lord withdrew the authority of the priesthood from the earth. This apostasy lasted until Heavenly Father and His Beloved

Son appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820 and initiated the Restoration of the fullness of the gospel.⁵¹

Today, there is a litany of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that can result in a member of the Church being charged with apostasy, and ultimately excommunicated. Many of these missteps are directly involved with the way in which one approaches family life. For instance, in the past few decades, members have been excommunicated for engaging in homosexual relationships and advocating for the inclusion of women in the priesthood. All of these conversations that the Church apostates are engaging with suggest an alternative to the Church's strict directions surrounding marriage practices and gender dynamics.

In 2015, the Church officially labeled individuals in same-sex relationships as apostates and forbade children in their households from being baptized. Then, in 2019, Church authorities rolled back their previous policy. Emma Green, a writer for *The Atlantic*, reported that “under the new policy, same-sex marriages are still considered a ‘serious transgression’...but not definitively apostasy. The children of LGBTQ couples can now be baptized.”⁵² In essence, the teachings on queer sexuality have not changed, but the language has become gentler.

Apostasy is not, however, reserved merely for queer individuals, but their allies as well. John Dehlin, a Ph.D. in clinical and counseling psychology created a podcast called Mormon Stories in 2005 to talk about cultural and historical issues in the Church. His podcast deals with issues such as same-sex marriage and bishops' suspicious sexual conversations with young members. In 2015, Dehlin faced a charge of apostasy and was excommunicated for his open online criticism of Church teachings. His experience came right on the heels of a human rights

⁵¹The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. *Apostasy*. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/apostasy?lang=eng> (accessed 3/8/2020, 2020).

⁵²Green, Emma. “The Mormon Church Tries to Create a Little More Space for LGBTQ Families.” *The Atlantic*, 4/9/2019, 2019, sec. Family.

lawyer named Kate Kelly, who founded the website Ordain Women. In 2014, her support for the movement to allow women to hold leadership positions within the Church, as well as to be ordained with the priesthood, led to her excommunication.

Although excommunication is not a permanent state within the Church, neither Dehlin nor Kelly ever tried to reverse their dismissals-- instead, both adopted anti-Church stances on their social media platforms. But not everyone can be so accepting of leaving the Church. After Kelly's excommunication, a member of the board of Ordain Women, named April Young Bennet, was forced by her bishop "to resign from the board and remove blog posts questioning why women are not allowed in Church leadership positions."⁵³ Bennet felt that she had no choice but to remove herself from the movement because her brother's wedding was coming up and in Latter-Day Saint religion only members of the Church can attend the temple sealing.

John Dehlin and Kate Kelly, as intellectuals and advocates for minorities within the Church, walk in the footsteps of the September Six. This was the nickname given to a group of writers who were excommunicated from the Church in 1993 for publishing scholarly work that criticized Latter-Day Saint doctrine surrounding the family. Members of the September Six argued in favor of women holding the priesthood and exposed the Church's history of polygamy.

In 2019, one member of the September Six, Lavina Fielding Anderson was denied her petition for rebaptism by the First Presidency of the Church. Anderson had kept the covenants of the Church and continued to attend weekly Sacrament Meetings at her local ward. *Salt Lake Tribune* writer, Peggy Fletcher Stack reported that "she has sat quietly in the same pew as the emblems of the sacrament [bread and water], have passed by more than 1200 times without her

⁵³Holpuch, Amanda. "Excommunication Looms Over Mormons Grappling with Some of Church's Tenets." *The Guardian*, 2/6/2015, 2015, sec. Religion.

being able to partake.”⁵⁴ The president of her stake reconvened the council of authorities who had excommunicated her twenty-five years ago for apostasy. The council invited her to read a letter detailing her faith. In the letter, she affirmed all the tenets of the Church but also voiced concern about its exclusive policies, such as barring worthy LGBTQ individuals from being married in the temple and blocking worthy women from the male-only priesthood. This regional council did approve her rebaptism and sent it to the Church headquarters for the official decision.

In August of 2019, the First Presidency denied Anderson’s plea for rebaptism, even though Avraham Gileadi and Maxine Hanks, two other members of the September Six have been welcomed back into the Church. The First Presidency’s reasons for denying Anderson were that her work tackled the issue of feminism in the Church, and this issue remains unresolved in the mind of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The role of women in the Church has been a longtime source of conflict for Latter-Day Saints and remains so today.

What John Dehlin, Kate Kelly, and the September Six all have in common, is that they oppose the Church’s stance on gender roles, sexuality, and other family values. Their experience demonstrates that to deny the family ideals of the Church is to be excluded from the Plan of Salvation. The young woman may learn from these individuals that to deny that a marriage is meant for one and one woman, or that a husband is the one and only holder of the priesthood, is to stumble and fall on the path back to the Celestial Kingdom. In order to progress along the running track, the young woman will have to hold fast to the family values set out by the Church.

⁵⁴Stack, Peggy Fletcher. “Writer Excommunicated during ‘September Six’ Purge Loses Her Bid to Rejoin the LDS Church”. *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 9/5/2019, 2019, sec. Religion.

Section 5: Death

“Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die.” -Doctrine and Covenants, 42:45

As the young woman completes the loop around the running track, having grown up, as well as married and raised her own children in the Church, she will die. Yet this does not mean the end of her journey, but rather a final leap toward her Heavenly Father. Death, as an event, is significant to Latter-Day Saints in the way that it shifts the dynamics within the family. Once deceased, the young woman no longer dwells with her earthly family but is reunited with her Heavenly Father, her Savior Jesus Christ, and her loved ones who have gone before her. Still, she knows that she will eventually be reunited with her entire family and that they will enjoy eternity together. Furthermore, even once the young woman has died, her relationships with her family will remain strong. In fact, through eternal sealings families create a link to the Celestial Kingdom by binding themselves together in a relationship that lasts beyond death and into everlasting life. Because Latter-Day Saint families last for all time and eternity, the young woman’s living relatives will continue to care for her and her ancestors even after they are gone. This is practiced through particular funeral rites, proxy baptisms, and sealings for the dead. None of these rituals are laced with much mourning or a sense of loss, as faith in the continuation of the relationship is at the crux of the religion. Because the young woman’s familial relationships are the key to her salvation, after her death her family will continue to ensure that she safely reaches Heavenly Father.

When the young girl is dying, her father or brothers will use their priesthood authority to anoint her with oil and seal her to the Celestial Kingdom. Once dead, her mother and sisters will prepare her body for burial by dressing her in her sacred temple garments, given to her when she first received her temple ordinances. Then, the young woman's family will begin to guide her to the Celestial Kingdom during her funeral service. Her family will bury her because Latter-Day Saints believe that burial ensures that the body and spirit can be resurrected as one, as is taught in the scriptures. Then, the young woman's funeral service will be focused on honoring Jesus Christ, in order to orient the deceased toward her Savior. The rite will be held under the authority of the priesthood and will be considered an official Church meeting, rather than a family gathering. Therefore, the music, speeches, and prayers will not be chosen by her family, but by the Church leadership. The eulogies will not reflect on the young woman's life but preach Latter-Day Saint doctrine. The young woman's family will not be asked to deliver any original words, but simply give a family prayer and dedicate the grave. If members of the family do decide to speak, they will be obliged to adopt a tone of reverence and teach the principles of the gospel. They will be discouraged from telling stories or speaking in a way that lacks spirituality and reverence. In fact, overly joyful or humorous speech is discouraged as Latter-Day Saints believe that they are very close to God at the time of death. There are tender feelings and spiritual communications which are easily lost if there is no spiritual reverence.

The Latter-Day Saint funeral helps Church members to construct their sacred family on a cosmological scale as it symbolizes both the transition from the material life to the Celestial Existence and the ability of the family to stay connected with those who have passed on. Though the funeral service does not explicitly emphasize the family through personal eulogies, it displays

the family's attempt to usher the deceased into the Celestial Kingdom, so that they might ensure that they will all meet again in the home of their Heavenly Father. It is understood that if the young woman's family did not take such care to practice these rites at the time of her death, then her family unit might be severed, and they might not experience salvation.

Since the religion's beginning, Latter-Day Saint rituals and beliefs surrounding death have centered around the family's attempt to control the dying's move into the afterlife. Priesthood holders are believed to be able to administer death-bed healing rituals for his family members. By the power and will of Heavenly Father, bestowed upon Joseph Smith and passed down through the priesthood, it is possible for a man to heal their loved ones at the time of their death. It is important to remember that:

seeking death through liturgical means shifted some control over Death from God to the community. Death, in spite of healing rituals, demonstrated the limits of power bestowed by God upon the faithful; however, the ritual hastening of death showed how even these boundaries were not entirely fixed....The [Latter-Day Saint] deathbed is a place of negotiation between participants and God.⁵⁵

There are many accounts throughout Church history of the sick being healed. However, there are also stories of people dying even after receiving healing. Joseph Smith justified this failure with three reasons: lack of faith to be healed, lack of power to heal, and God's will. However, what is most important is that priesthood holders have the ability to heal their family members. Those who are sick are not left only to the will of God, but also to the will of their family. Kinship can heal, and it can save.

In the face of failed healing attempts, Latter-Day Saints find comfort in utilizing the power of the priesthood and the family to ensure that Heavenly Father will receive the individual, solidifying the community of Saints through eternity. This is achieved through proxy

⁵⁵Stapley, Johnathan A. "Last Rites and the Dynamics of Mormon Liturgy." *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (4-1-2011, 2011): 97-128.p.105

baptisms, in which members reach back into the past, and practice baptisms for their ancestors who have long been dead. Through these proxy baptisms, Latter-Day Saints believe that their actions have a direct impact on the salvation of their late family members. They believe that they can retroactively save those who did not repent and accept Christ's gospel during their lifetime.

The young woman would have grown up knowing that in order to save as many family members as possible, she and her family must keep meticulous records of their family lineage. During the 2015 General Conference, a biannual gathering of the Church in which all members gather to hear sermons from the Church authorities, the former prophet Spencer W. Kimball emphasized the importance of proxy baptisms and the Latter-Day Saints need to be thorough with this practice. He ordered that:

all members should write a personal history and participate in a family organization. Also, we want to emphasize again and place squarely upon the shoulders of these individuals and their families the obligation to complete the four-generation program. Families may extend their pedigree beyond the four generations if desired.⁵⁶

What Kimball is referring to with the four-generation program is the obligation of all Church members to fill out a series of forms that record all members of their family's four most recent generations. For Latter-Day Saints, family histories are immensely important, as the means to keep track of all who need to be baptized. Just as closeness between the nuclear family and its unity lasting for eternity are prioritized, so is the entire bloodline.

The proxy baptism ritual began alongside the initial restoration of the Church when Joseph Smith was visited by the Angel Moroni. At first, elders sealed the dead by themselves into eternal life. Then, the practice expanded its meaning. In 1835, in Kirtland, Ohio, the biblical prophet Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and his apostle Oliver Cowdery and granted them the

⁵⁶Kimball, Spencer W. "Worthy of all Acceptation."
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1978/10/worthy-of-all-acceptation?lang=eng>.

power and authority to seal people together in relationships that persist beyond death. Again, on July 12, 1843, Heavenly Father revealed to the Prophet, Joseph Smith:

Verily verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife according to my word, and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, according to mine appointment, and he or she shall commit any sin or transgression of the new and everlasting covenant whatever and all manners of blasphemies and if they commit no murder, wherein they shed innocent blood yet they shall come forth in the first resurrection and enter into their exaltation.⁵⁷

These revelations gave way to the understandings that once individuals were sealed together, they could never totally fall away from the grace of God. Through the very act of being together in an Adam and Eve inspired kinship bond, people can be saved. The glory of the family relationship was stronger than any sin and thus could wash it away. From that point on, Smith declared that individuals would not be sealed into the Celestial Kingdom alone; instead they would be sealed to their family members. Eternal life became entirely relational. The proxy baptisms began to create a network of families that dwelled both on earth and in the Celestial Kingdom. Meanwhile, those who had not been sealed to their family were to be alone for eternity and excluded from celestial glory.

Latter-Day Saints are attached to the sealing practice because of the understanding that being connected is equivalent to being saved. If one is in relationship with another, then they cannot stray away from Heavenly Father. In a life wrought with hardship and disarray, the Church seeks the solace of the temples and the practice of sealing the living and the dead in order to “build the eternal structure of the cosmos.”⁵⁸ Sealing ensures salvation and establishes the

⁵⁷Stapley, Johnathan A. *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*, edited by Oxford University Press. New York: Sheridan Books Inc., 2018.p.2

⁵⁸Stapley, Johnathan A. *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*, edited by Oxford University Press. New York: Sheridan Books Inc., 2018.p.5

network of the eternal priesthood. It brings the order and peace from the Celestial Kingdom here onto Earth.

As the young woman completes her lap around the running track, returning to where she began, she will re-enter the Celestial Kingdom only with the help of her family. Though a lifetime of faithfully and reverently following Christ, obeying the directions of the Church, and cultivating strong relationships with her family, will bring the young woman to the finish line, it will be her family's efforts at the time of her death that ensure that she can remain with her Heavenly Father for eternity.

Conclusion

In the end, our young woman has completed a full lap around the running track, and in doing so, has returned to where she started: the Celestial Kingdom. Before she initially passed through the veil of forgetfulness, in order to learn, through the human experience, how to be a more perfect version of herself, relationality meant very little to her. In the pre-mortal existence, her relationship with her spirit brothers and sisters did nothing to help her progress in spiritual perfection. But then, with the Fall of Adam and Eve, leaning on one's earthly family became the way in which an otherwise winding and confusing path back to Heavenly Father transformed into a clearly delineated running track. Through family relationships, the way becomes clear, even, and well-defined.

This paper, introduced originally as an exploration of the family structure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, naturally shifted into a study of the salvific. This paper

could not possibly be about both the religious and the familial as distinct concepts, as these are not separate entities within the Church. This thesis is about family life as religious practice. For Latter-Day Saints to relate to somebody through marriage and family is a form of prayer, and engaging in sacred rituals is a way of solidifying family bonds.

As our young woman explored sealings, polygamous marriages, the law of chastity, and all of the ways that one can be labeled an apostate, she learned that the only way to complete her loop around the running track was through a family structure that was meticulously crafted by the Church. Nothing about the Latter-Day Saint family is an accident. From the time that Adam followed Eve out of the garden, to when Joseph Smith took multiple wives, until all families are united in heaven, each step brings families closer together but also closer to their Heavenly Father.

It was once intended that this paper would illustrate how the kinship structure of the Latter-Day Saints came to be as a consequence of the religion. But over time it became obvious that family life is the religion. It is the way back to the Celestial Kingdom. It is the Plan of Salvation.

Coda: Latter-Day Saint Feminism

“How badly I wanted to belong as I had when I was a young Mormon girl, to be simply a working part in the great Mormon plan of salvation, a smiling exemplar of our sparkling difference. But instead I found myself a headstrong Mormon woman staking out her spiritual survival at a difficult point in Mormon history.” -Joanna Brooks, *The Book of Mormon Girl: Stories from an American Faith*

Our young woman’s journey around the running track will be characterized greatly by her gender identity. Her position as a woman in the Church will dominate her experience traveling toward the Celestial Kingdom. Oftentimes, she will feel that her Church encourages her to be silently obedient toward the men in her life. She will be asked to be nothing but a mother and wife and to elect not to work outside the home. What if the young woman sees more for herself? What if she wants to be seen or heard as more than simply a homemaker? Will she still be able to move toward the Celestial Kingdom? If this were the case, then our young woman would not be alone. There are many Latter-Day Saint women who have fought to reconcile their feminist ideology with their Latter-Day Saint faith. This is not an easy endeavor, as the Church’s family values and female empowerment seem, at first glance, to be at odds.

In 1995, when Church President Gordon B. Hinckley delivered “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”, he proclaimed that women “are primarily responsible for the nurturing of their children,” as “the preservation of the home is left chiefly to the wife and mother.”⁵⁹ Hinckley is just one in a long tradition of Latter-Day Saint authorities working to keep women silent and obedient.

Throughout its existence, the Church has worked to exercise control over different areas of women’s lives. In 1951, Elder Spencer M. Kimball addressed the students of Church-owned

⁵⁹Greenfield, Curtis, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays. “Living the Divine Divide: A Phenomenological Study of Mormon Mothers Who are Career Professionals.” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 16.1 (2016). p.2

Brigham Young University in his speech *A Style of Our Own: Modesty in Dress and Its Relationship to the Church*, which labeled the “immodest dress worn by young [Latter-Day Saint] women and their mothers as contributors to the breakdown of moral values in America.”⁶⁰ Kimball’s speech became the catalyst for a larger conversation within the Church about modesty. In the 1960s, Church leaders became increasingly concerned with having women dress in a way that reflected the ideals of chastity and femininity. Following Kimball’s example, Elder Mark E. Peterson delivered a talk to the Relief Society, the Latter-Day Saint women’s philanthropic and educational organization, in 1962. His talk blamed the temptation of boys to commit sexually abusive behavior on girls’ clothing. In other words, he described immodest dress as an invitation that girls extended to young boys.

The Church’s diminishing view of women is held not only by men, but by women as well. Elaine Anderson Cannon, former president of the youth organization Young Women, and the first president to have a professional career, relinquished an opportunity to advocate for gender equality among Latter-Day Saints. Cannon was president of Young Women during the 1970s, an era in which feminism was in full force in the greater United States. Her leadership platform provided her with the opportunity to support the feminist movement by encouraging other women to work outside of the home. Many Latter-Day Saint women assumed that she would encourage their daughters to pursue a career, but “Cannon was uneasy at the prospect that young women would use her as a role model for the new feminist agenda. She stated that her

⁶⁰Blakesley, Katie C. “A Style of our Own: Modesty and Mormon Women, 1951-2008.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42.2 (2009).p. 20

ability to juggle outside employment and a family was not something she was encouraging for others.”⁶¹

Even today, our young woman will be discouraged from seeking professional or intellectual fulfillment and be told to find her worth solely within the home. She would feel this entrapment with immense saliency if she were to walk through the Church-owned Monument to Women Memorial Garden in Nauvoo, Illinois. She would travel alongside the statues, each one depicting the next stage in a Latter-Day Saint woman’s life. When the young woman came to the last statue, the final stage, she would find an elderly woman, frail, and alone, sitting in a rocking chair, sewing a quilt. It might be most disturbing to the young woman that the title of the statue is *Fulfillment*. The irony of the title might strike the young woman, as it struck the historian Claudia L. Bushman, that there is nothing “more for the wise, experienced, creative woman of the Church to do than sit, rock, and stitch.”⁶² The young woman, along with Bushman, will be left with the question: “What is it that women are supposed to learn on our sojourn on the earth? Is it to be good and quiet, to be always obedient to our superiors? Do women lose their value if they speak out?”⁶³ The young woman’s experience at the Memorial Garden would reflect the question of all Latter-Day Saint feminists: do women have spiritual value beyond their spiritual obedience? Or is it utterly blasphemous for Latter-Day Saint women to act with individuality and empowerment? This question bears extra weight because women’s role as wives and mothers is not just a social dimension of patriarchy, but sits theologically at the core of the Latter-Day Saint

⁶¹Woodger, Mary-Jane. “Elaine Anderson Cannon, Young Women General President: Innovations, Inspirations, and Implementations.” *Journal of Mormon History* 40.4 (2014).p.180

⁶²Bushman, Claudia L. “Should Mormon Women Speak Out? Thoughts on our Place in the World.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41.1 (2008)p.80

⁶³Bushman, Claudia L. “Should Mormon Women Speak Out? Thoughts on our Place in the World.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41.1 (2008).p.180

Plan of Salvation. If women are not wives and mothers in the way that the Church asks them to be, they risk their own, as well as their families' salvation.

Fortunately, in this author's view, our young woman is not alone. There exists within the world of academia a host of Latter-Day Saint women dedicated to answering questions like the young woman's. They explore feminist ideologies within the context of Latter-Day Saint tradition. But are their efforts futile? Is it possible for women to be both faithful Latter-Day Saints and feminists? Feminism, the belief that access to opportunity should not be predicated upon gender, seems to stand directly at odds with the Latter-Day Saint notion that men are called upon by Heavenly Father to hold the priesthood, and women are meant only to be mothers, and nothing else.

The question of whether women can be both feminists and Latter-Day Saints is divisive not only between Church authorities and Latter-Day Saint feminists but also among the women themselves. Three scholars, Curtis Greenfield, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays conducted *A Phenomenological Study of [Latter-Day Saint] Mothers Who are Career Professional Women*. In the opening lines of this paper, they state that the Church “upholds a cultural expectation for women of their community to remain unemployed outside the home and to dedicate their early adulthood to bearing and raising children.”⁶⁴ And even though many modern Latter-Day Saint women do work outside the home, they are counseled by Church leaders on the local, national, and even global levels to do so only out of financial necessity. These theological and cultural expectations lead working mothers to struggle as various aspects of their identity and livelihood pull them in opposing directions. This conflict can cause depression, stress, anxiety, and anger.

⁶⁴Greenfield, Curtis, Pauline Lytle, and F. Myron Hays. “Living the Divine Divide: A Phenomenological Study of Mormon Mothers Who are Career Professionals.” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 16.1 (2016).p.1

Women in the Church cannot pursue careers without risking social alienation from their religious peers. Greenfield, Lytle, and Hays found through their study that Latter-Day Saint mothers with careers experienced exclusion, judgment, and criticism from other women in their wards who did not have jobs. In this social climate that often breeds shame, many Latter-Day Saint women grow to feel that they cannot have both a thriving professional career and a healthy involvement with their Church.

Still, there are women who do boldly and publicly identify as both feminists and Latter-Day Saints. This begs the question: can our young woman belong to a Church whose teachings often explicitly impede feminism? She would have to endure social ostracism, threats of a severed relationship with Heavenly Father, and neglect from religious authority. In order to reclaim her faith, she would have to seek out a feminist community and a more personal relationship with Heavenly Father. Ultimately, she would find that empowered faith is possible. She can be a feminist through the development of a more authentic relationship with God that is not dictated by human authority.

The entirety of the young woman's religious experience is vulnerable to the decision of the Church authorities, who have the ability to receive divine revelation from Heavenly Father. With this ability, Church leaders facilitate the young woman's intimate relationship with her God. They become a necessary medium through which to connect personally with the divine. Latter-Day Saints take the official decrees of their authorities to be the Word of Heavenly Father and thus grant these men a degree of reverence that would otherwise be reserved for Him. Church authorities, as a mouthpiece for Heavenly Father, can easily penetrate the bubble of the young woman's individuality and privacy. Then, when Church authorities silence and oppress

her, it is particularly harmful as the oppression is seen as coming directly from Heavenly Father. She opens herself up completely to Heavenly Father through these human men, only to learn that her God values her only for her domestic obedience.

Silenced and oppressed by men of great power, our young woman will suffer in her relationship with Heavenly Father. Before she can restore this relationship, she must discover for herself a community of people who understand the pain she has endured. Sharing and coming together grants power to a group of downtrodden women, and draws them closer to Heavenly Father.

Our young woman would benefit greatly from meeting author, memoirist, and scholar, Joanna Brooks, who claimed that when she was eight years old, there were no Latter-Day Saint feminists in her world and that it wasn't until her college orientation at Brigham Young University, that she was introduced to Latter-Day Saint feminism as a concept. By the time she was writing the article, 'Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years,' Brooks had become an esteemed Latter-Day Saint feminist theologian, attributing her progress to feminist networks. Within these communities, she has been able to feel more comfortable within the faith, referring to her cohort as her 'spiritual home.' She was able to glean kinship and support from her fellow feminist academics and through this connectivity, Brooks was able to develop a firm sense of self as both a Latter-Day Saint and a feminist. Brooks has been "fed, sheltered, warmed, and nurtured by her community as a thinker, believer, critic, activist, writer, scholar, woman, and human being."⁶⁵ In support of this community, Brooks wrote a letter to former Church president Kimball in 2014, in which she claimed to be a part of a group that loved their Heavenly Father, Christ's gospel, and His Church. She said that she and her fellow feminists had tithed and raised

⁶⁵Brooks, Joanna. "Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years". *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47.4 (2014).p.1

their children in the Church and were now simply asking for more respect and justice. Kimball never responded to her letter.

If our young woman were to do her research, she would find that Latter-Day Saint feminist communities have existed throughout history and are not just a product of the modern era. By honoring the legacy of brave women through time, she might expand her community to all Latter-Day Saints who have acted in favor of female empowerment. She would likely discover Susa Young Gates, who in 1886 was granted permission to publish *The Young Woman's Journal* by Church President Wilford Woodruff. Gates wanted her journal to serve “as an outlet for the literary gifts of the girl members...while representing the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁶ The magazine featured articles about health and hygiene, dating tips, etiquette, and other topics that concerned young women in the Church. While *The Young Women's Journal* published content that reinforced the binary gender roles that the Church supported, this magazine also raised women's voices outside of the home and into the public sphere. It was a medium through which Latter-Day Saint women could talk to each other and have their voices heard.

As our young woman builds her community, she can grow from feeling isolated and silenced to feeling seen and heard by other feminists. Then, she can begin to reestablish a relationship with Heavenly Father as well. Only this time, Heavenly Father assumes a form that is safe and affirmative, rather than intrusive and driven by oppressive Church authorities. By listening to the stories of other Latter-Day Saint feminists, our young woman will find that in the midst of these personal narratives, there is a natural flow from a collection of anecdotes about

⁶⁶*The Young Woman's Journal*. Salt Lake City: [vol. 1] Juvenile Instructor Office; [vol. 2-8] Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons; [vol. 9-40] Deseret News. Vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1889)-vol. 40, no. 10 (October 1929). 23 cm.

human companionship, to personal experiences of meeting with a more compassionate Heavenly Father.

Joanna Brooks candidly moves in her speech from discussing community to musing about Heavenly Father's view of women. She calls to action her fellow Latter-Day Saint feminists, telling them, "We need to develop our personal and collective spiritual independence...[because] God wants better for us."⁶⁷ Brooks is introducing a God who empowers Latter-Day Saint women, rather than the God introduced by Russell M. Nelson and M. Nelson Ballard in the opening paragraphs of this essay, designed to keep women small. Brooks embarks on a mission to empower women to seek out religious truth in the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, rather than from human authority. She is simultaneously honoring the history and tradition of Latter-Day Saint faith and adopting a distinctively feminist voice.⁶⁸

Heidi Hart, in her memoir *Grace Notes*, joins the conversation on a more regretful note. She details her experience within the Latter-Day Saint Church that surely could have used the solidarity and affection that Joanna Brooks posits in her speech. Hart describes a yearning for a female God, who might help her to find her voice, both as a Latter-Day Saint and as a woman. She remembers asking her mother:

about a rumor [she'd] heard from a friend, that there really was a Mother in Heaven. 'Maybe there is,' [her] mother said, 'but we don't know anything about her.' I got the idea that I shouldn't ask too many questions about this invisible woman in the sky. Sometimes I had the urge to pray to her, to talk, to ask her about Heaven, but I never dared...I carried this longing for years into adulthood, as I became more and more uneasy in a church that withholds its priesthood from women. I projected my sense of lack onto the God I wanted to believe in.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Brooks, Joanna. "Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47.4 (2014).p16

⁶⁸Trible, Phyllis. "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread." In *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, edited by Kvam, Kristen E., Schering, Linda S., Ziegler, Valerie H. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. Hebrew Bible Scholar, Phyllis Tribble contributes well to Latter-Day Saint feminists' attempt to find support for feminist ideologies in their religious tradition. Tribble's re-read of Genesis 2-3 empowers Eve as an equal counterpart to Adam, rather than an inferior companion.

⁶⁹Hart, Heidi. *Grace Notes: The Waking of a Woman's Voice*. Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 2004.

Like Joanna Brooks, Hart had a childhood of not knowing that Latter-Day Saint feminism existed, and left the Church before its feminist communities became established and interconnected. Thus, Hart never realized how real and present Heavenly Mother is to many of her fellow Latter-Day Saint women. Her notion of an ‘invisible woman in the sky’ is not only rooted in her imagination. Rather, Latter-Day Saint scripture posits that “while there is no record of a formal revelation to Joseph Smith regarding a Heavenly Mother, some early Latter-Day Saint women recalled that he personally taught them about a Mother in Heaven.”⁷⁰ Still, the possibility of a Heavenly Mother is swept under the rug as the Church teaches members to pray only to Heavenly Father. Though Heidi Hart did not realize it, Latter-Day Saint feminists often work to cultivate a relationship with their Heavenly Mother despite the Church’s vague presentation of Her.

In her article “Heavenly Mother: The Mother of All Women” Blaire Olster asserts that Heavenly Mother’s unique esthetic of feminine deity offers Latter-Day Saint women a divine parent to relate to.

She imagines a:

Heavenly Mother, as the mother of all women, [who] holds multitudes under her wings. Hers is the face that is reflected in the motherly woman, the independent woman, the infertile woman, and the queer woman.... Her image is the image of all those that choose the label woman.⁷¹

Olster is illustrating a Heavenly Mother who supports not only cisgender, heterosexual mothers, but all underrepresented and marginalized women as well. She is calling Latter-Day Saints from the fringes to tell them that there is a God for them too. Olster is expanding on Joanna Brooks’

⁷⁰Smith, Joseph. *Doctrine and Covenants*. 132: Marriage; an Eternal Covenant., edited by Joseph Smith. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1835.

⁷¹Olster, Blaire. “Heavenly Mother: The Mother of all Women”. *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* 51.4 (2018).p. 181

call for Latter-Day Saint women to build a supportive community with each other, as well as to find their feminist ideals rooted in the theology of the Church, even when they are as hidden and secretive as Heavenly Mother.

Latter-Day Saint, feminist, and scholar, Jennifer Basquiat explains that throughout the Church's history, various authorities, such as Apostle Rudger Clawson, have recognized that both men and women have a need to worship and adore a Mother in Heaven. By recalling the words of powerful men who emphasize a female God, she is calling Latter-Day Saints to find feminist ideals within the Church's existing theology. She makes a clear distinction that those who are fighting for a more feminist Church,

are not challenging the totality of [Latter-Day Saint religion]....Rather, they wish to expand the selective historical tradition to include feminist experience and events that have historically been denied representation, as well as to leave the door open for further revelation concerning women and the priesthood.⁷²

A recognition of Heavenly Mother, Basquiat argues, would empower women to leave the home and become active members of their community. It would put them on a more level playing field with their male counterparts.

As the young woman listens to Jennifer Basquiat, Blaire Olster, and the other Latter-Day Saint feminists, she will learn to develop a relationship with her Heavenly Father or Heavenly Mother without the man behind the pulpit as the mediator. She will thus find an alternative to the invasive, judgmental, and oppressive Heavenly Father that had previously made her feel silenced. Her new Heavenly Father or Mother will be a source of empowerment and support, encouraging her to remain faithful despite being silenced by Church authorities. Although this experience of oppression would drive many from the Church, the young woman will have the

⁷²Basquiat, Jennifer. "Reproducing Patriarchy and Erasing Feminism." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17.2 (2001).p. 28

option to remain. Women like Brooks, Basquiat, and Olster remain because they are able to cultivate relationships with other women who understand their experiences of trauma, which drowns out the voices of those who had originally inflicted the trauma. The women learn to be vulnerable with others, which ultimately makes them stronger.

Catholic theologian Robert Orsi describes in his book *History and Presence* the religious power of a community of oppressed individuals coming together to share in their yearning for liberation. Orsi would likely say about Latter-Day Saint feminists that their sharing of a desire for a voice allows them to “make it possible for other women to express themselves too, to each other, in circles of mutual recognition and conversation.”⁷³ Through this recognition and conversation, these women can “express their doubts, their sense of betrayal, and their anger with God, but also consider the articulation of their feelings as prayer spoken to God.”⁷⁴ Orsi writes that:

Being in the company of others speaking their stories affords women the recognition they need to bridge their silent and isolated interiorities with their public and visible personae. In turn, this unfolding process of integration makes it possible and even imperative for them to search out a God adequate to the persons they were discovering themselves to be and the persons they were becoming. This was not the God of their childhood.⁷⁵

This newfound strength allows them to turn to God, and see Her for who they need Her to be: a loving mother, an understanding friend, a breath of fresh air.

When Latter-Day Saint feminists gain an empowered personal faith it becomes a threat to the Church as an institution. The Church remains strong because of the millions of people who follow every word of its authorities. If members were to focus more on their religious community, as well as their individual relationship with God, the Church hierarchy would

⁷³Orsi, Robert. "Events of Abundant Evil." *History and Presence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016.p.109

⁷⁴Orsi, Robert. "Events of Abundant Evil." *History and Presence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016.p.236

⁷⁵Orsi, Robert. "Events of Abundant Evil." *History and Presence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016.p. 248

collapse. Take, for example, the practice of collecting tithes. Latter-Day Saints are expected to pay one-tenth of their income to the Church. The authorities make decisions, according to revelation, on how to spend this money. Most typically, the money is used to build and maintain temples or support missionary work.

If Latter-Day Saint feminists develop a more personal relationship with God, rather than knowing him only through Church authorities, then their incentive to trust male authorities with their tithings will crumble. Without the influx of cash, the Church's power will diminish. As these women learn that their Church holds both sexist and oppressive figures and compassionate, feminist thinkers, they will feel empowered to give their energy, money, and support to those structures and ideas within the Church that liberate, rather than diminish the woman's experience.

Our young woman, through radical staying, has the power to challenge the powerful men within the Church. Radical staying means demanding authorities to use their closeness to God to lift women up, rather than keep them down. It means asking Church leaders to recognize that their role in their relationship between a member and God is one that grants them access to the most vulnerable aspects of the member's 'self'. The young woman can engage in radical staying by acknowledging the existence of Heavenly Mother within her Church's tradition. She can allow Her to lead her to hold more active roles, in and out of the Church. Because of women's ability to receive divine revelation establishes them as mediators between the human and the divine, they must take a step back and allow the human-divine relationship to take up space. They must allow for families and individuals, that do not perfectly adhere to Latter-Day Saint traditions, to have a personal relationship with Heavenly Father.

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