



International Journal of Mormon Studies

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MORMON STUDIES

In Search of Mormon Identity: Mormon
Culture, Gospel Culture, and an American
Worldwide Church

Wilfried Decoo

Volume 6 2013 [01-53]

International Journal of
Mormon Studies

Volume 6

2013



PUBLICATION DETAILS

EDITOR

David M. Morris

EDITORIAL BOARD

James D. Holt

Kim B. Östman

Ingrid Sherlock-Taselaar

The *International Journal of Mormon Studies* is a European based internationally focused, peer-reviewed online and printed scholarly journal, which is committed to the promotion of interdisciplinary scholarship by publishing articles and reviews of current work in the field of Mormon studies. With high quality international contributors, the journal explores Mormon studies and its related subjects. In addition, *IJMS* provides those who submit manuscripts for publication with useful, timely feedback by making the review process constructive. To submit a manuscript or review, including book reviews please email them for consideration in the first instance to submissions@ijmsonline.org.

International Journal of Mormon Studies (Print) ISSN 1757-5532
International Journal of Mormon Studies (Online) ISSN 1757-5540

Published in the United Kingdom

©2013 *International Journal of Mormon Studies*

All rights reserved.

<http://www.ijmsonline.org>

IN SEARCH OF MORMON IDENTITY: MORMON CULTURE, GOSPEL CULTURE, AND AN AMERICAN WORLDWIDE CHURCH¹

Wilfried Decoo

Abstract: In Mormon parlance, both ‘Mormon culture’ and ‘gospel culture’ are used to define Mormon identity. Outside lies the ‘culture of the world’, which was once highly valued by Mormons, until its meaning changed. This article traces how these terms relate to evolving perspectives. It leads to questions viewed in the international context. What makes a religious culture and how does Mormonism fit? How American is Mormon culture worldwide? How Mormon is gospel culture? How can members around the world define and live their relation with the surrounding non-Mormon culture? How feasible is it for converts to ‘Keep every good thing you have’ in the formation of their Mormon identity? How much room is there for local culture in the church? These reflections also reveal deeper concerns as to Mormon identity: too much contrast with the world – the antonymy factor – may lead to increasing exclusivism within the church, causing distress among other members, if not disengagement from Mormonism. It is true Mormon identity must be distinct but, in view of the problem of retention, it must be viable also.

INTRODUCTION

Mormon identity has been the focus of numerous studies.² One of the terms used to define a global identity pertaining to members of the

¹ I wrote a preliminary version of this text in 2007. I used portions as posts on *Times and Seasons*, which generated valuable comments. A few sections yielded material for the chapter on Europe in the upcoming *Oxford Handbook to Mormonism* and for a paper given at the Claremont Conference ‘Beyond the Mormon Moment: Directions for Mormon Studies in the New Century’ (2013). This present version, which has been reworked and updated, thus has some overlap with previously presented material. I wish to thank Lavina Fielding Anderson, James A. Toronto, and Armand L. Mauss for their valuable comments on the drafts of this present version.

² Most of these studies pertain to historical developments. For a focus on present-day identity, see, e.g., Michael R. Cope, ‘You Don’t Know Jack: The Dynamics of Mormon Religious/Ethnic Identity’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009); Eric A. Eliason, ‘The Cultural Dynamics of Historical Self-Fashioning: LDS Pioneer Nostalgia, American Culture, and the International Church’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 140–

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is 'culture'. It appears in two idioms, 'Mormon culture' and 'gospel culture'. The first one is a familiar concept, about which much has been written for almost a century. The second, gospel culture, is a more recent and less-studied term. Both terms have various connotations, according to what is included or discarded. This article tries to better grasp this notional diversity, in particular for the newer 'gospel culture'. I am not equipped to conduct such analysis from an anthropological or sociological expertise, but my linguistic background can help in the history and in the disambiguation of meanings. I also relate this analysis to my personal experience as a Mormon, from half a century of church involvement in Europe, in order to consider implications in an international perspective. Some of these considerations may be equally applicable to Mormonism in the United States.

This article starts by chronicling various definitions and approaches, first of 'Mormon culture', second of 'gospel culture'. Perspectives of 'gospel culture' in relation to 'the other' are inventoried on a scale of six perspectives. The shift from 'Mormon' to 'gospel' in church parlance illustrates a movement of more emphasis on Christian identity and universality. Next I discuss a number of questions meant to better identify the concept of gospel culture. These pertain to the exclusivity of the concept, the nature of religious culture, the inclusion of Mormon lifestyle and of American elements, and the definition of what is (in)compatible with gospel culture. A final part expands the reflections to the so-called antonymy factor: could it be that the more gospel culture

173; Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Armand L. Mauss, 'Identity and Boundary Maintenance: International Prospects for Mormonism at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century', in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. by Douglas J. Davies (London and New York: Cassell, 1996), pp. 9–19; Armand L. Mauss, 'Refuge and Retrenchment: The Mormon Quest for Identity', in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. by Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 24–42; Armand L. Mauss, 'The Mormon Struggle with Identity', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 27, no. 1 (1994), 129–149; Rick Phillips and Ryan T. Cragun, *Mormons in the United States 1990–2008: Socio-demographic Trends and Regional Differences. A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008* (Hartford, Connecticut: Trinity College, 2011); Ethan R. Yorgason, *Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

is stressed as exclusive and isolating, the more members individually shift to fundamentalism or opt out?

Purposely I do not give a definition of culture, since our walk through the connotations is precisely meant to list a variety of approaches. It will appear that most of these connotations themselves remain more or less vague. My aim is not to elucidate them beyond their occurrence and general meaning. A certain degree of imprecision will therefore accompany the multiple uses of the word culture. As to other terms, 'church' refers to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 'Units' is used as a global geographical term for its branches, districts, wards, and stakes. 'International', 'foreign', and 'abroad' refer to realities outside of the United States. These words simplify, of course, an obvious complexity. Not only does the international church comprise disparate populations but also within the United States regional differences as well as social or ethnic characteristics of many Mormon units produce cultural variety.

One caveat: the analysis I attempt may leave an impression of insufficient positive highlighting of what the church achieves worldwide. I correct that impression from the outset: Mormonism brings much satisfaction and stability to hundreds of thousands of people in many countries. I have witnessed this impact over five decades in West Europe. But academic analysis broadens the picture. My aim is also to examine how past developments might augur future ones.

MORMON CULTURE: FACETS OF THE OUTWARDNESS

The creation of their own kind of society, 'a peculiar people' apart from the world, has been an essential part of the Mormons' history. Labeling this society a 'Mormon culture' comes only much later in the literature. Since there are multiple definitions of 'culture', 'Mormon culture' is also polysemic. However, one common element in nearly all studies up to the 1980s is location: Mormon culture belongs to a region, aptly called the 'Mormon Culture Region' in the American West.³ It is

³ Criteria to delineate the 'Mormon Culture Region' are found in Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, [1958] 1970); D. W. Meinig, 'The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847–1964', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 55, no. 2 (1965), 191–220; Samuel M. Otterstrom and Richard H. Jackson, 'The State of Deseret: The Creation of the Mormon

only more recently that ‘Mormon culture’ is applied to other parts of the world. The following enumeration follows the chronological order of sources that mention ‘Mormon culture’. These sources shape different (and overlapping) perceptions.

News: material accomplishments

In 1930 James H. Moyle defined ‘the culture “Mormonism”’ as accomplishments: health, education, the missionary system, unpaid clergy, and the charity system. He specified them for public relations and missionary purposes so that ‘the material benefits’ of this culture ‘arouse a desire to know why and from whence they come, and induce a study of the principles of the gospel’.⁴ Note the difference made between the tangible benefits, defined as ‘the culture’, and their higher source – ‘the gospel’. News about such accomplishments is found since the earliest church periodicals and in the semi-annual *Conference Reports*. The tradition to herald ‘the best of’ continues up to this day in church-related publications and websites to affirm identity, establish confidence within, and gain respectability outside. This stream of positive news thus spreads the image of a Mormon culture through the achievements of an effective organization bringing happiness to its members and the world.

Research: compound facets

The term ‘Mormon culture’ emerged in sociological research in the 1930s, preceded by other terms, like ‘Mormon group life’,⁵ the ‘Mormon social body’,⁶ and ‘Mormon community life’.⁷ In 1933 *The American*

Landscape in the Western U.S.’, in *Engineering Earth: The Impacts of Megaengineering Projects*, ed. by Stanley D. Brunn (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), pp. 1975–1995; Timothy James Scarlett, ‘Globalizing Flowscapes and the Historical Archaeology of the Mormon Domain’, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 10, no. 2 (2006), 109–134; Michael B. Toney, Chalon Keller and Lori M. Hunter, ‘Regional Cultures, Persistence and Change: A Case Study of the Mormon Culture Region’, *The Social Science Journal*, 40, no. 3 (2003), 431–445; and Yorgason, *Transformation*.

⁴ James H. Moyle, *Conference Report*, October 1930, pp. 126–127.

⁵ Ephraim Edward Ericksen, *The Psychological and Ethical Aspects of Mormon Group Life* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1922).

⁶ Hamilton Gardner, ‘Communism among the Mormons’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 37, no. 1 (1922), 134–174. For an economic study Gardner needed ‘an estimate of the qualities of the Mormon social body’ (p. 135).

⁷ Nels Anderson, ‘Review of *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire*, by Harry M. Beardsley, and *Zealots of Zion*, by Hoffman Birney’, *The American Journal*

Journal of Sociology mentioned that Nels Anderson is working on ‘a study of social change in a Mormon community’.⁸ A year later the journal noted that Kimball Young is working on ‘Mormon culture’,⁹ which is confirmed with the same term in the census of current research in the *American Sociological Review* in 1936. As in the news realm, there is a juxtaposition of the visible, outward Mormon culture with the inward religious realm. A 1940 review of a book on the ‘Mormon society’ concluded critically:

However, one who has followed this remarkable religion in all its factions, intricate doctrine, and endless revelation, cannot but feel that in this story of Mormon culture something is omitted. To understand Mormonism one must see it grow, change its beliefs, alter its practice! One might know all the rather commonplace details of external Mormon culture and yet never have been introduced to Mormonism.¹⁰

In 1952 the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters organized a ‘Symposium on Mormon Culture’. The published papers covered widely differing topics, from ‘A Community Portrait’ of St George by Juanita Brooks, to ‘Mormonism and Literature’ by William Mulder, ‘Trends in Mormon Economic Policy’ by Leonard J. Arrington, and the ‘Development of Mormon ethics’ by Gaylon L. Caldwell.

Since then, Mormon and non-Mormon experts from various disciplines have been researching Mormon culture in its many facets. In 1957 Thomas O’Dea’s *The Mormons*, as study of an ‘ethnic minority’, was an important step to validate this research outside of the church: a Jesuit sociologist taking Mormonism seriously.¹¹ Mormon journals like *BYU*

of Sociology, 38, no. 2 (1932), 323–324. Note that Anderson concludes that ‘both books fail to throw light on the nature of Mormon family or community life. These very significant subjects have rarely been touched upon except in caricature’ (p. 324).

⁸ *American Journal of Sociology*, 39, no. 1 (July 1933), p. 107.

⁹ *American Journal of Sociology*, 40, no. 1 (July 1934), p. 113.

¹⁰ George B. Arbaugh, ‘Review of W.J. McNiff. Heaven on Earth: A Planned Mormon Society’, *The Journal of Religion*, 20, no. 4 (1940), 107–108 (p. 108).

¹¹ Thomas O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

Studies and *Dialogue* next offered their venue to emerging researchers. Armand Mauss provides excellent overviews of work done in this academic realm.¹²

Art: esthetic expression

In the 1960s the term ‘Mormon culture’ was also used as a call to arms to help strengthen the artistic realm. Conan E. Mathews asked how to make art more meaningful to the church and to the world since ‘the artist in the Mormon culture constantly faces the question of how or if his art relates to his faith, religious service, and scripture’.¹³ Under the title ‘Mormon culture’, Stanley B. Kimball broke a lance for ‘constructive criticism’ to improve the work of Mormon writers and artists.¹⁴ Frequent in this context is also the term ‘Mormon art’, with the first annual ‘BYU Festival of Mormon Art’ in 1969. This art is seen as ‘the expression of cultural values of an idealistic people dedicated to the service of God and His church’.¹⁵ Noteworthy: in a 1974 review of ‘Mormon Arts’, Richard G. Oman, then still a graduate student, criticized the narrow Western approach and the lack of a multinational and multicultural perspective. He pointed to ‘the difficulty of trying to establish a single aesthetic broad enough to fit a broad spectrum of artistic styles’.¹⁶ Years later, Oman’s work, through the worldwide Mormon art competition by the Museum of Church History and Art, would contribute to the valuation of the international dimension of Mormon culture in the esthetic sense. In *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*, Terryl Givens detailed the origin

¹² Armand L. Mauss, ‘Sociological Perspectives on the Mormon Subculture’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1984), 437–60. Note his use of the term ‘subculture’ to position Mormonism as a species within a broader, dominant culture, in this case American, with which it shares a number of characteristics. See also Armand L. Mauss, ‘Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles: The State of Social Science Literature on the Mormons’, in Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 153–197.

¹³ Conan E. Mathews, ‘Art and the Church’, *BYU Studies*, 3, no. 2 (1961), 3–7 (p. 3).

¹⁴ Stanley B. Kimball, ‘Mormon Culture: A Letter to the Editor’, *BYU Studies*, 5, no. 2 (1964), 125–128 (p. 126).

¹⁵ Dorothy J. Schimmelfenning, ‘Review of Mormon Arts Volume I, by Lorin F. Wheelwright and Lael J. Woodbury’, *BYU Studies*, 13, no. 4 (1973), 588–590 (p. 589).

¹⁶ Richard G. Oman, ‘A Second Review of Mormon Arts Volume 1’, *BYU Studies*, 13, no. 4 (1974), 590–592 (p. 591).

and manifestations of this fertile esthetic culture, including also the intellectual development as part of a Mormon 'habit of mind'.¹⁷ His approach of Mormon culture is thus broader than art and architecture as such, but smaller than the spectrum of all aspects of life.

Lifestyle: worldwide uniformity

In the 1970s the term 'Mormon culture' became a marker of distinctiveness and cohesion for 'lifestyle' in worldwide perspective. Its characteristics have been abundantly described.¹⁸ They include religiosity (faith in the doctrines, daily prayer, scripture study, fasting, church and temple attendance), morality (chastity, modesty, honesty), family (monogamy, focus on marriage and children, togetherness, fidelity, family home evening, food storage), health (no alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea), dedication and involvement (serving, tithing, going on a mission, doing genealogy), education (schooling, degrees, and diplomas), work (work ethic, professional advancement, economic success), material objects (book of remembrance, Mormon pictures in the home, recognition medallions), and its own lexicon. The negative look at the Mormon lifestyle includes critique of the social pressure to conform, the insularity toward non-Mormons, the distrust of feminism, and the condemning attitude toward homosexual behavior.

This lifestyle extends to all corners of the church. Jan Shippo noted that Mormons are 'so separate and distinct that new converts must undergo a process of assimilation roughly comparable to that which has taken place when immigrants adopt a new and dissimilar nationality'.¹⁹ Shippo also pointed out that the standard building plans for chapels worldwide allowed the 'sense of place', which had long been tied to the

¹⁷ Givens, *People of Paradox*.

¹⁸ See, for example, Tim B. Heaton, Stephen J. Bahr and Cardell K. Jacobson, *A Statistical Profile of Mormons: Health, Wealth, and Social Life* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004); Tim B. Heaton and Cardell K. Jacobson, 'The Social Life of Mormons', in *Oxford Handbook to Mormonism*, ed. by Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, in press); Loren Marks and Brent D. Beal, 'Preserving Peculiarity as a People: Mormon Distinctness in Lived Values and Internal Structure', in *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's "The Mormons": Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffman and Tim B. Heaton (Salt Lake City: Utah University of Utah Press, 2008), pp. 258–285.

¹⁹ Jan Shippo, 'The Mormons Looking Forward and Outward', *The Christian Century*, 95 (1977), 761–766 (p. 765).

Mormon Culture Region, to spread to other regions: ‘The very fact that these clearly identifiable LDS structures could be found in town after town and suburb after suburb cultivated among the Saints what might be called a Zionic sense, making the very LDS meetinghouses themselves agents of assimilation.’²⁰ Garth N. Jones remarked that for converts in non-Western societies, ‘it is not a question of socio-cultural accommodation – certainly this must take place – but one of actually “retooling” people into a new lifestyle’.²¹

The mechanisms to get converts ‘retooled’ to adopt this lifestyle include the commitments made when baptized, the example of missionaries and other members, the involvement in the local church unit, and the constant encouragement to be part of the lifestyle through lessons, talks, conferences, and home and visiting teaching.²² Uniformity is reinforced by the worldwide correlation since the 1960s, which ensures consistency in all church programs under the direction of the priesthood. It includes standardized training and lesson material, a streamlined church education system, a common worldwide magazine, identical planning of church meetings with fixed musical norms, and the standards for temple attendance. Current church policy to consolidate weak and scattered units in order to grow from centers of strength, where the church order is well established and where role models help new members to integrate, reinforces this trend toward a common lifestyle. Also slow developments that Armand Mauss identified in popular Mormon culture

²⁰ Jan Shippy, ‘The Emergence of Mormonism on the American Landscape (1950-1965)’, in *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. by S. Kent, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon and Rich Jackson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 152. See also Paul F. Starrs, ‘Meetinghouses in the Mormon Mind: Ideology, Architecture, and Turbulent Streams of an Expanding Church’, *Geographical Review*, 99, no. 3 (2009), 323–355.

²¹ Garth N. Jones, ‘Expanding LDS Church Abroad: Old Realities Compounded’, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 13, no. 1 (1980), 8–22.

²² An outsider analysis of the process of ‘mormonization’, including from an international perspective, is found in Sophie-Hélène Trigeaud’s extensive doctoral dissertation, ‘Conversion, Éducation, Communauté: Une Étude Socio-Anthropologique, Transnationale et Contemporaine, des Pratiques et Représentations des “Saints des Derniers Jours” ou “Mormons”’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2008). It was published in a revised form as *Devenir Mormon: La Fabrication Communautaire de l’Individu* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

in America carry over to other parts of the world, such as the softening of doctrine into more emotional spirituality and the feminization of worship music.²³

The lifestyle even extends to physical appearance via dress and grooming standards. Strictly followed by the missionaries and stressed at church schools, these norms tend to be adopted by members at large, sometimes at the explicit request from local leaders. A white shirt and tie has become an expected Sunday dress for priesthood holders. Advice has been given as to tattoos, body piercings, and beards. A kind of ideal standard was promoted in Julie Beck's 2007 general conference address, in which even in Third World countries it is gratifying to see on Sunday 'daughters in clean and ironed dresses with hair brushed to perfection' and where 'sons wear white shirts and ties and have missionary haircuts'.²⁴ Contrary to occasional voices who plead for the maintenance of local customs, it seems that many members in foreign lands actually like to adopt this uniformity, as the outward manifestation of Mormon belonging. BYU's program 'Especially for Youth', now offered in many countries, seems to exert a strong influence in standardizing 'ideal' behavior among young Mormons. Of course, not all members conform to this lifestyle. But it is telling that anyone who deviates, even without breaking any commandment – like wearing piercings or not dressing up properly for Sunday meetings – catches the eye as 'peculiar' within the 'peculiar people'.

The other side: the (refined) 'culture of the world'

Mormon texts also speak of the 'culture of the world', outside the Mormon realm. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, the term pertains to the 'refinement and culture prevalent among the rich', in particular with reference to education, as Brigham Young praised it.²⁵

²³ Armand L. Mauss, 'Feelings, Faith, and Folkways: A Personal Essay on Mormon Popular Culture', in *Proving Contraries: A Collection of Writings in Honor of Eugene England*, ed. by Robert A. Rees (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2004), pp. 23–38. Surveys among older church members in foreign countries could verify my own experience of these developments.

²⁴ Julie B. Beck, 'Mothers Who Know', *Ensign*, October 2007, pp. 76–78. At the time, Beck was president of the Relief Society, the church's organization for women.

²⁵ Brigham Young, 8 August 1869. In *Journal of Discourses*, G. D. Watt, ed. (Liverpool: F.D. & S.W. Richards, 1869) vol. 14, p. 104. Brigham Young

‘Culture’ as a particular civilization also appears in many Mormon texts that mention the highly appreciated Aztec, Maya, Greek, or Italian cultures. In 1936 Preston Nibley lauded George Q. Cannon in these terms: ‘He grew in knowledge, in ability, in strength of character; in his varied travels he absorbed the culture of the world.’²⁶ The May 1937 *Improvement Era* editorial extolled the pioneer Bowen family: ‘Though living under pioneer conditions, they drank the culture of the world from books of classic merit.’²⁷ Note the openness toward this ‘culture of the world’. The following period will radically change its meaning.

GOSPEL CULTURE: AN ASSERTIVE SHIFT IN APPROACH

In the 1970s the term ‘gospel culture’ enters Mormon parlance. The choice between ‘Mormon culture’ and ‘gospel culture’ signals a significant change in approach. ‘Mormon culture’ relates to general aspects of life, encompassing religious, social, economic, and educational facets, tied to the Mormon Culture Region and its past, with an emphasis on material accomplishments. ‘Gospel culture’ focuses on religious life as such, independent of place. The shift from ‘Mormon’ to ‘gospel’ thus reflects a movement away from local peculiarity and geographical separateness to the worldwide membership ‘living the gospel’. As shown above, early occurrences of ‘Mormon culture’ already made that distinction between the material realm and a higher sphere. The shift marks also a distancing from the word ‘Mormon’ in order to stress Christian identity and universality. It seems to liberate the church from a complex and troubled past in a specific area – a past which the term ‘Mormon’ continues to evoke in the minds of many outsiders. The shift goes hand in hand with a greater emphasis on Jesus Christ since the 1980s and a call to the press to avoid the nickname ‘Mormon church’ in favor of the official name of the church.²⁸ The emphasis on ‘gospel’ can also be seen

spoke in the context of raising the level of the saints from ‘poverty and privation’ in order to ‘make ladies and gentlemen of them’ through education.

²⁶ Preston Nibley, *Brigham Young, The Man and His Work* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1936), p. 352.

²⁷ ‘Editorial’, *The Improvement Era*, May 1937, p. 304.

²⁸ See the 1999 *Media Style Guide* of the church. The request was reiterated in the First Presidency letter of 23 February 2001, obviously related to the growing media attention for the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Afterwards, ‘Mormon’, as an inescapable international moniker, was kind of rehabilitated in church websites (www.mormon.org; mormonnewsroom.org) and in PR-initiatives (‘I’m a Mormon’ campaign). Some tension at the top around the use

as a rather assertive move: Mormonism lays claim on the term ‘gospel’, which belongs to all Christians, as its own realm.

Before 1970 occurrences of ‘culture’ in this emphasized religious sense are rare and somewhat ambivalent. In 1862 Amasa M. Lyman stated that the development of the kingdom of God on earth depends ‘upon the culture of the feelings that rule the soul and that give character to the action of the creature’.²⁹ In 1867 Erastus Snow lamented that Mormon parents neglect to properly educate their children, which leads ‘to see the rising generation without that culture they so much need to develop within them a love of righteousness, truth, and every holy principle’.³⁰ In a 1947 conference talk, Spencer W. Kimball mentioned the responsibility ‘to bring the gospel with all its progress and culture to the Indian’.³¹

The worldwide expansion of the church in the 1970s triggered more attention to intercultural issues. The year 1976 in particular saw a number of interventions and publications dealing with culture-definitions in a worldwide gospel perspective, most being part of ‘The Expanding Church Symposium’ held at BYU or in the wake of that Symposium.³² It is here that the term ‘gospel culture’ cogently enters Mormon parlance. The implications are multifaceted.

HOW TO VIEW ‘THE OTHER’: SIX PERSPECTIVES OF GOSPEL CULTURE

Identity is defined by boundaries. Without ‘the other’ – other nations, ethnicities, languages, social groups, religions, and more – one

of the church’s name seems to remain. See M. Russell Ballard, ‘The Importance of a Name’, *Ensign*, November 2011, pp. 79–82. On the blog ‘Times and Seasons’, I commented on this in a post ‘Mormons without the Mormon Church’, timesandseasons.org/index.php/2011/10/mormons-without-the-mormon-church/

²⁹ Discourse by Elder Amasa M. Lyman, October 7, 1862. In *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 10, p. 86.

³⁰ Remarks by Elder Erastus Snow, October 8, 1867. In *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 12, p. 177.

³¹ Spencer W. Kimball, *Conference Report*, October 1947, p. 15.

³² The texts of the symposium are in *Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures*, ed. by F. LaMond Tullis (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978). Note that the *Ensign* of December 1976 brought a summary of the various viewpoints in two articles: Lavina Fielding, ‘The Expanding Church’ and ‘Selected Remarks: Excerpts from “The Expanding Church” Symposium’.

cannot fully delineate a certain entity. In order to be a ‘peculiar people’ Mormons have always been concerned with the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Those concerns shape the contours of disparate views of gospel culture. I propose to identify these views on a tentative antonymic scale³³ in six perspectives, moving from one extreme to the other in various grades. The order of the perspectives does not represent a chronology since they co-exist throughout church history. The in-between perspectives partly overlap in their flow from one to another.

First perspective: Antagonistic isolation from the other

In this perspective the gospel culture is seen as a hallowed, protective enclave away from the world. Literally leaving ‘Babylon’ in order to ‘gather to Zion’ was an essential part of nineteenth-century Mormonism. Transposed to the symbolic concept of ‘multiple Zions’ around the world, the idea of leaving the world to be part of a ‘stake of Zion’ has remained vibrant in Mormonism. In the 1976 Symposium, Noel B. Reynolds claims that ‘the world view of the gospel is essentially subversive of the world views perpetuated by the cultures of man’. Obedience to the gospel ‘takes priority over any requirements of a traditional culture’.³⁴ Likewise, in one of the first uses of the term ‘gospel culture’ in the context of internationalization, Arturo and Genevieve DeHoyos claim that a Latter-day Saint convert ‘cannot simply acquire a testimony of the gospel without almost entirely reevaluating and reorganizing his own personal value system so it can fit without major conflict within the gospel culture’.³⁵

Since the 1990s Mormon texts typically define gospel culture in these contrastive and separative terms. An oratory of repentance calls people to reject the ‘culture of the world’ – an expression which now takes on a diametrically opposed meaning compared to a few decades

³³ An antonymic scale contains two opposites, for example ‘tolerance – intolerance’, but language also provides words for a gradation wherein the two original words have a place: ‘broadmindedness – receptiveness – tolerance – neutrality – distrust – intolerance – fanaticism’. This very example is relevant for the perspectives discussed here.

³⁴ Noel B. Reynolds, ‘Cultural Diversity in the Universal Church’, in *Mormonism*, ed. Tullis, pp. 7–21.

³⁵ Arturo DeHoyos and Genevieve DeHoyos, ‘The Universality of the Gospel’, *Ensign*, August 1971, pp. 9–14. This article tried to compare and structure the value orientations between three cultural realms, celestial, Mormon, and Anglo-American.

earlier. Cherry B. Silver of the Relief Society General Board phrases it in the known imagery of moving: 'We need to move from the culture of the world to the culture of the gospel. In the culture of the gospel we have the model of Jesus and of families striving to live in covenant relationships.'³⁶ Or in the words of Robert E. Parsons, who explains why the church could be 'under condemnation':

We insist upon following the culture of the world rather than having a pure style of our own. [...] We insist that we participate in the world's music, dance, literature, and entertainment. [...] Truly we are caught up in vanity – futile, worthless behavior in which we find excessive self-satisfaction in thinking that both God and the world are pleased with us.³⁷

This shift in connotation of 'culture of the world', from its positive meaning in the first half of the twentieth century to a negative one in the second half, could well be used as an illustration of the cycle of assimilation to retrenchment which Mauss has analyzed.³⁸ Through stricter control of the curriculum, the church's correlation movement contributes to this perspective of isolation and exclusivism: 'Don't use extraneous sources when teaching courses in the church. [...] The whole effort is to make a curriculum that can be used anywhere in the world, under any cultural or political circumstance, so that the only culture we're bound by is the culture of the gospel.'³⁹

The perspective of antagonistic isolation fosters deep distrust toward the world. The accompanying rhetoric is always two-tone. The positive tone stresses exceptionalism (a chosen generation, a select people, a kingdom of Priests) and exemplarism (a beacon on a hill, a light unto the world). The negative one paints the rest of the world as evil and threatening. Missionary work is seen as saving souls from Babylon and bringing them to the fold. This fundamentalist position is in essence every

³⁶ Cherry B. Silver in a 'Women's Conference Panel', *Church News*, 13 May 1995.

³⁷ Robert E. Parsons, 'I Have a Question', *Ensign*, February 1991, pp. 51–53.

³⁸ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

³⁹ Elder Rex D. Pinegar, as quoted in Julie A. Dockstader, 'Curriculum: Helping Members Apply Gospel to Daily Lives', *Church News*, 29 December 1990.

scriptural, both in ancient and modern holy writ, and many of the citations used in the dualistic discourse draw directly from these sources. It is also a recurring theme in Mormon hymns.

Second perspective: Exemplary impact on the other

In his comments on Reynold's talk, Hugh Nibley takes a less dichotomous stand.⁴⁰ He first defines 'a gospel culture' (note the indefinite article) starting from the idea of a gospel community or society, which is Zion, 'described as a city, an organized society, set apart from the world'. The most detailed example known is Israel, which, led by Moses out of Egypt, had to become a peculiar people, 'a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation'. The same injunction was given to the saints of early Christianity. The Restoration through Joseph Smith aimed at the same constitution of 'a single culture peculiar to Mormons' and at distancing itself geographically in a gathering place.

However, in contrast to an antagonistic perspective that excludes the rest of the world from anything valuable, Nibley stresses that in former times this 'single, central celestial culture' has served 'as a model for the greatest peaks of human civilization as a whole'. Religions and philosophies sprang forth from the model and as long as they continue to point to heaven they share in the original heritage, 'convinced that they were imitating the heavenly model and doing the best they could'. Nibley thus sees cultures in shades, with admiration for those which are more close to the original gospel culture. In the comparison with the ideal, this construct is essentially successive: the model is lost, but from its demise much brilliance can still emerge.

This perspective also explains why Nibley does not define the present gospel culture as an enclave closed to external input, but as a society composed of 'everything good', with reference to the thirteenth Article of Faith, which he elaborates on: 'Moreover, we *seek* after every good thing; we are in the market for everything good.' This 'good' of others comes originally from a divine source. As such the gospel culture seems to come close to the 'broad inclusion'-approach, which I will discuss in a moment, but Nibley's outlook of Zion remains a distinct entity 'set apart from the world'.

⁴⁰ Hugh Nibley, 'Comments', in *Mormonism*, ed. Tullis, pp. 22–28. Republished as 'Some Notes on Cultural Diversity in the Universal Church', in *Temple and Cosmos, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, ed. by Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), XII, pp. 541–549.

Third perspective: Selective appreciation in the other

The perspective laid out by Nibley is known in church doctrine as the historical pace of divinely sanctioned ‘dispensations’, each followed by a period of apostasy that corrupted the full truth, but that also maintained parts of it. Thus all religions contain also valuable elements. Talking about believers in other religions, Joseph Smith recognized that ‘they all have a little truth mixed with error’ and that ‘good and true principles’ could be gathered in the world.⁴¹ Still, during the rest of the nineteenth century, condemnation of other churches and sects was quite common in Mormon harangues. The persecutions endured at the hands of other Christians, the concept of the Restoration following the ‘Great Apostasy’, and an apocalyptic, millenarian world view contributed to this antagonism.⁴² After 1890, however, openness to the world and a spirit of conciliation with other churches became more prevalent. In 1906 B. H. Roberts explained the apparent awkwardness of the words that ‘all their creeds were an abomination’.⁴³ He clarified that this opposition had to be understood as the clash between good and evil, the church of the devil being ‘the whole empire of Satan’, with evil men who could be found in any church, even in the Mormon church. As to other churches, ‘so far as they have retained fragments of Christian truth – and each of them has some measure of truth – that far they are acceptable unto the Lord; and

⁴¹ ‘Discourse’, 23 July 1843, in *History of the Church*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, rpt. 1970), p. 517. At the same time, Joseph Smith had much contempt for the ‘creeds’ and the ‘professors of Christianity’ who are inspired by the ‘smooth, sophisticated influence of the devil, by which he deceives the whole world’ (Ibid., p. 218). It ties in with the First Vision account that ‘all their creeds were an abomination’ (Joseph Smith – *History in The Pearl of Great Price*, chapter 1, verse 19). In his own development, Joseph Smith moved from antagonism to more tolerance, according to the circumstances of his life. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), pp. 284–285, 377–378.

⁴² See Eric Dursteler, ‘Inheriting the Great Apostasy: The Evolution of Mormon Views on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 28, no. 2 (2002), 23–59; Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Matthew J. Grow, ‘The Whore of Babylon and the Abomination of Abominations: Nineteenth-Century Catholic and Mormon Mutual Perceptions and Religious Identity’, *Church History*, 73, no. 1 (2004), 139–167. Grow documents how Mormons also counted Protestant churches, and even the whole of American society, as part of the Whore of Babylon (pp. 146–148).

⁴³ *Joseph Smith – History in The Pearl of Great Price*, chapter 1, verse 19.

it would be poor policy for us to contend against them without discrimination'. They are all part of the 'kingdom of righteousness'.⁴⁴ The difference with the second perspective, discussed above, is a less separatist stance.

This selective appreciation became widely accepted in Mormon thought – as can be found in texts by Joseph F. Smith, George Albert Smith, John A. Widstoe, Moses Thatcher, James E. Talmage, Joseph L. Wirthlin, and Ezra T. Benson, who speak with respect of 'the great religious leaders of the world'. It ties in with the notion that any man can be enlightened by the Spirit of Christ. In 1978 the First Presidency issued a statement echoing many similar acknowledgments in the past:

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.⁴⁵

The Mormon position is still presented as superior, as it claims to possess the fullness, while others only have 'a portion'. Missionary work can thus be phrased as a diplomatic invitation: since a foundation of truth is already present in the other religion, people can retain it. The dynamics of conversion can be expressed as an addendum, as George Albert Smith phrased it:

Keep all the glorious truths that you have acquired in your churches, [...] all the knowledge and truth that you have gained from every source. [...] That is all a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then let us sit down and share with you some of the things that have not yet come into your lives that have

⁴⁴ Brigham H. Roberts, *Conference Report*, April 1906, pp. 14–15. Also published in B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, I (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1907), p. 34. For a discussion of the possible views that European Mormons harbor toward other religions, see Mauro Properzi, 'The Religious "Other": Reflecting upon Mormon Perceptions', *International Journal of Mormon Studies*, 3 (2010), 41–55.

⁴⁵ 'Statement of the First Presidency Regarding God's Love for All Mankind', 15 February 1978.

enriched our lives and made us happy.⁴⁶

Marion D. Hanks stated it similarly: ‘Keep every good thing you have, and then listen to the additional word of the Lord in our time.’⁴⁷ In a rhetorical address to members from Christian churches, Hartman Rector Jr. exclaimed: ‘We won’t take anything from you that you have that’s true; we will just add to what you have, and we will do it in love, with no compulsion, no force.’⁴⁸ This approach can make converts believe that they can keep most of their original religious culture, just supplementing it with what was lacking. Viewed from the Mormon perspective, the recognition of truths in other cultures consequentially means that these truths are included in the ‘gospel culture’.

Fourth perspective: Selective exclusion in the other

A reverse movement is first to define what a gospel culture is in Mormon perspective, invite converts to adopt it in full, and then ask them to erase from their original backgrounds what is incompatible. That approach is present in several talks by apostle Dallin H. Oaks. He defines gospel culture as ‘a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’. He explains that ‘this gospel way of life [...] is given expression in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives’. Converts thus ‘become part of the worldwide gospel culture of commandments and covenants and ordinances and blessings’.⁴⁹ It is an encompassing definition, with a strong globalizing undertone and emphasis on religious living. As to the relation with the original cultures of converts, Elder Oaks adds: ‘We have learned the importance of challenging members to abandon cultural traditions that are contrary to gospel commandments and covenants.’ His examples mention the realms of chastity, of weekly attendance at church, of abstention from alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee, and of honesty.

⁴⁶ George Albert Smith, *Sharing the Gospel with Others* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), p. 201. The excerpt comes from a sermon delivered on November 4, 1945.

⁴⁷ Marion D. Hanks, ‘Without Prejudice, without Bigotry’, *BYU Devotional*, 30 March 1965.

⁴⁸ Hartman Rector Jr., ‘Our Witness to the World’, *Ensign*, July 1972, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Dallin H. Oaks, ‘Give Thanks in all Things’, *Ensign*, May 2003, pp. 95–98. See also his talks ‘Repentance and Change’, *Ensign*, November 2003, pp. 37–40; ‘The Gospel Culture’, *Ensign*, March 2012, pp. 40–47; ‘Truth and Tolerance’, *Religious Educator*, 13, no. 2 (2012), 1–15.

The difference with the preceding approach – selective appreciation – is that the focus is placed on negative items in other cultures. It entails a double shift in perspective. First, the term ‘cultural traditions’, which conventionally has a positive meaning, is associated with behavior such as sexual transgressions and dishonesty. However, normally no ‘culture’, in its primordial meaning of carrier of values, would condone immorality as part of its time-honored customs. By tying the possibility of rejection to certain ‘cultural traditions’, any local habit can thus be made suspect. Second, in contrast to Okazaki’s approach in the perspective I discuss next, no mention is made of positive examples that people could retain from their cultures, although this is obviously possible since only ‘contrary’ traditions have to be discarded.

Fifth perspective: Broad inclusion of the other

In terms of outcome, this fifth approach is similar to the previous one, but the rhetorical emphasis starts with a much more positive outlook toward others. In a 1971 talk about missionary work in Korea, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie conceded that ‘whatever is appropriate and good we want to preserve’. Therefore, Korean people are allowed ‘to preserve their culture, to keep their own dances and their own dress and their own mores and ways of life alive, as long as they are not inharmonious with gospel principles’.⁵⁰ Sorenson referred to this talk to defend a view where the ‘core of Mormonism in its most basic expression’ is found in the higher levels of ideology, values and knowledge – a common ‘world view’ –, but should be allowed to diversify into local cultural forms on the lower levels of physical realization, thus adapting ‘living the gospel’ to other patterns and customs than those in America’s West.⁵¹ In 1976, Belgium born Charles Didier, of the First Quorum of Seventy, responds in the *Ensign* to a question dealing with the place of national feelings among church members. He answers:

When we speak of nationalism, or culture, there is in reality only one nation or one culture: the nation of God and the gospel culture, a vast amalgam of all the positive aspects of our cultures, histories, customs, and languages. The building of the kingdom of God is such an amalgam, and is the only place

⁵⁰ Quoted in *The Expanding Church*, ed. by Spencer J. Palmer (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1978), p. 147.

⁵¹ John L. Sorenson, ‘Mormon World View and American culture’, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 8, no. 2 (1973), 17–29.

where these different values may and can coexist.⁵²

This view on gospel culture is broad and much-inclusive, with the perspective of a good deal of diversity in the kingdom of God.

Another 'foreign' church member, Chieko N. Okazaki, of Japanese ancestry and at one time counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, stresses that same understanding of broad inclusion: to build bridges between cultures, 'the greatest bridge of all is the culture of the gospel'. She defines the gospel as 'a culture based on the atonement of Christ and the restoration of his pure gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith'. In practice, it means: 'Faith, repentance, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, living together in a righteous community, and serving each other with love are all principles of that culture. These principles are true in any culture and among all peoples.'⁵³ Note the inclusion of gospel culture as 'principles' within other cultures. In another book, Okazaki describes the present-day desertion of specific scriptural rules (e.g., in the Bible, no eating of pork, women's hair covered): 'Instead of focusing on these rules that no longer make sense in our own culture, we focus on the principles behind them: eat healthy food and dress modestly.' Since principles of the gospel can exist in other cultures, Mormons can therefore respect them in the format of those cultures. As examples Okazaki mentions how the principle of prayer allows her to pray with her mother at the Buddhist household shrine, or how the principle of family unity allows her to participate in fun Sunday afternoon activities with her extended non-Mormon family. Her conclusion: 'Before you dismiss any cultural practice, think about the principle behind it, decide if this principle is one you also believe, and see if you can find a way to participate in it in a way that honors that principle.'⁵⁴

A comparable approach is found in a 1993 *Ensign* article on South Africa which, under the subtitle 'A gospel culture', quotes Elder Richard P. Lindsay, president of the Africa Area: 'The answer to bridging different cultures is the gospel. What the church is doing is building a gospel culture that transcends all boundaries and barriers.' The process

⁵² Charles A. Didier, 'I Have a Question', *Ensign*, June 1976, p. 62.

⁵³ Chieko N. Okazaki, *Lighten Up! Finding Real Joy in Life* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1993), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Chieko N. Okazaki, *Disciples* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1998), pp. 147–149.

is described as dynamic and tentative: ‘The final composition of that gospel culture yet awaits us for we are still in the process of building it.’ The idea is to define the essence of the gospel – ‘that unchangeable and unchanging center which you cannot adapt to other cultures’. Next, determine ‘which aspects of a particular culture, for example, are healthy and wholesome parts of a people’s identity and needn’t be changed’.⁵⁵ The article also cites Jan Hugo, president of the Benoni stake in South Africa, as he reflects on early missionary efforts to African cultures: ‘Some of the mistakes were that very often we tried to Americanize or South Africanize the people instead of ‘gospelize’ them. [...] It is the gospel, not any particular culture that changes people’s lives.’ The *Ensign* continued in the same vein with an article on the Polynesian Cultural Center: ‘The continuing internationalization of the church depends on members who understand and respect each other’s cultures and heritages. Within the gospel culture, we must be like a delicious fruit salad, made up of distinctive parts yet unified in our purpose.’⁵⁶

Such optimistic projections are easy to make, until church leaders are confronted with specific situations of far-reaching cultural mixing. The historical examples show the challenges involved and how individual interpretations varied as to the allowed boundaries.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Quoted in R. Val Johnson, ‘South Africa: Land of Good Hope’, *Ensign*, February 1993, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Alton L. Wade, ‘Laie – A Destiny Prophesied’, *Ensign*, July 1994, p. 68. Note that the Polynesian Cultural Center has also been criticized for its colonial folklorization of foreign cultures: ‘The racialization of the Native as primitive—always out of time in modernity—is what tourists buy at this “cultural park for ethnographic tourism”’: Hokulani K. Aikau, *A Chosen People, A Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai‘i* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 140. See also an anthropological critique of the PCC by Vernadette V. Gonzalez, ‘Consuming “Polynesia”’: Visual Spectacles of Native Bodies in Hawaiian Tourism’ in *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin (Bingley, U.K.: Howard House, 2009), pp. 191–216.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Marjorie Newton, ‘From Tolerance to “House Cleaning”’: LDS Leadership Response to Maori Marriage Customs, 1890–1990’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 22, no. 2 (1996), 72–91; D. L. Turner, ‘Akimel Au-Authm, Xalychidom Piipaash, and the LDS Papago Ward’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 39, no. 1 (2013), 158–180.

Sixth perspective: Sublimating universalism of it all

Again in the wake of the 1976 BYU Symposium, Gordon B. Hinckley, then a member of the Twelve, throws another light on the issue in a BYU devotional address. The thrust of his message is twofold: cultural differences hardly matter in missionary work and cultural differences are disappearing. For the first aspect, Elder Hinckley remarks that ‘these differences are of minor importance in comparison with the great burden of our responsibility to teach the gospel of the Master and that alone’. And: ‘The Spirit of the Lord will overcome the effect of any differences in culture or other situations between a missionary and those he teaches.’ For the second aspect, Elder Hinckley notes the ‘shrinking cultural barriers’ and the reasons for it: the ease of modern travel has ‘sublimating effects of such intercourse among nations insofar as cultural differences are concerned’; the rising educational levels in the world are ‘a concomitant factor of greater understanding of the ways and customs of other people’; and the ‘increasing knowledge of languages’ facilitates better mutual comprehension. Finally, Elder Hinckley mentions ‘the tremendous erosion of strong cultural patterns in many parts of the earth’. For him, ‘people are essentially the same everywhere, all over the earth’ in their love, appreciation for beauty, concern with suffering, a sense of right and wrong, ‘and the universal recognition of a higher power’.⁵⁸ That globalizing attitude toward the world became a leitmotif in many of Elder Hinckley’s conference talks when he spoke as church president: ‘We must be better Latter-day Saints. We cannot live a cloistered existence in this world. We are a part of the whole of humanity.’⁵⁹

Evaluation

The six perspectives on this tentative antonymic scale, each advocated by faithful Latter-day Saints, reflect how different these authoritative voices, at least in their rhetoric, can be. Each chosen perspective discloses personality and identity. Taken at face value, the six perspectives make it arduous to classify Mormonism on the continuum between church and sect. Indeed, one criterion to assess religions is their degree of alignment with the surrounding society.⁶⁰ Groups completely

⁵⁸ Gordon B. Hinckley, ‘Things are Getting Better’, Brigham Young University 1976 Speeches, 8 April 1976.

⁵⁹ Gordon B. Hinckley, ‘Look to the Future’, *Ensign*, November 1997, p. 67.

⁶⁰ David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, ‘Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent

aligned become viewed as socially and culturally integrated churches. At the other end are ‘sects’ that reject any alignment and claim their uniqueness as quintessential outsiders. In between are groups that claim to be part of a dominant religious tradition (like those Mormons who claim to be ‘a’ Christian church) or that otherwise pick and choose along the way. According to which Mormon voice speaks in favor of one of the six perspectives, Mormonism can thus be placed at will anywhere on this continuum between church and sect. This ambiguity also explains the disparate assessments by non-Mormons: has Mormonism become a conventional church, or is it still a cult, or something in between? According to the perception of more normalcy or more aberration, opinions vary. The church’s Public Affairs proclaims Mormons’ normalcy and societal integration, as in the ‘I’m a Mormon’ campaign, but the internal ecclesiastical message to the church’s own members typically stresses separation. In Terryl Givens’ terms, the dualism marks the Mormon paradox of exceptionalism versus eclecticism and universalism.⁶¹

In the construction of identity, what can the individual Mormon make of these six perspectives? On the one hand, all the perspectives proceed from the same underlying principle — the gospel shapes a desirable identity, broadly defined as a Christ-centered, virtuous life. Or it can be more specifically circumscribed, as in Elder Oaks’ terms, as ‘a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members’. On the other hand, the differences in perspective invite the individual member or the potential convert to choose between different boundaries with ‘the other’ — from a resolute rupture with the world to a reassuring embrace of the world. The contradiction is, of course, faux: each approach is equally valid depending on its focus on good or on evil in the world, and on the audience and the objectives of the speaker — hence the word ‘perspectives’. Individuals, however, easily adopt a dominant attitude. In their daily dealings and their own religious rhetoric, the uncompromising

Tradition Groups’, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 15, no. 3 (2012), 4–28. Bromley and Melton build on Johnson’s tension model: Benton Johnson, ‘On Church and Sect’, *American Sociological Review*, 28, no. 4 (1963), 539–549.

⁶¹ Givens, *People of Paradox*, pp. 54 and 72. Note that the concept of ‘universalism’ versus ‘Israelite descent’ refers to a different direction, namely, that the restored gospel is universally applicable to save humankind, independent of privileges of lineage. See Arnold H. Green, ‘Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 25, no. 1 (1999), 195–228.

minds will tend to isolate themselves from the evil world, while the more indulgent will demonstrate confident openness toward a wonderful world. Missionaries and many local members usually stress separation from the world, thus sometimes placing on potential converts a burden of self-exclusion from their original culture. In their contact with other members, converts may experience other attitudes. They may become confused about what brand of identity change is expected. What does it mean, in terms of identity, to become a Mormon, to become part of the gospel culture? The next section seeks for answers.

GOSPEL CULTURE: SEVEN QUESTIONS RELATED TO IDENTITY

For decades the study of Mormon identity has focused on Mormons within the United States, with special attention, naturally, to the Mormon Culture Region in the American West, but also to comparisons with American members elsewhere in the United States.⁶² Relatively few studies extend to Mormon identity in foreign countries or cultures.⁶³ The

⁶² See, e.g., Cope, *You Don't Know Jack*; Mauss, *The Angel*, pp. 35–45 (for a comparison of California and Utah Mormons); Richard D. Phillips, 'Saints in Zion, Saints in Babylon: Religious Pluralism and the Transformation of American Mormonism' (unpublished dissertation, The State University of New Jersey, 2001); Susan Buhler Taber, *Mormon Lives: A Year in the Elkton Ward* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

⁶³ Examples include Ian Barber, 'Between Biculturalism and Assimilation: The Changing Place of Maori Culture in the Twentieth-Century New Zealand Mormon Church', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 29 (1995), 142–169; Wilfried Decoo, 'Mormonism in a European Catholic Country: Contribution to the Social Psychology of LDS Converts', *BYU Studies*, 24, no. 1 (1984), 61–77; Jessie L. Embry, 'Ethnic Groups and the LDS Church', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 25, no. 4 (1992), 81–96; Henri Gooren, 'Latter-day Saints under Siege: The Unique Experience of Nicaraguan Mormons', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 40, no. 3 (2007), 134–155; Mark L. Grover, 'The Maturing of the Oak: The Dynamics of LDS Growth in Latin America', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 38, no. 2 (2005), 79–104; John P. Hoffmann, *Japanese Saints: Mormons in the Land of the Rising Sun* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007); David Clark Knowlton, 'Hands Raised Up: Power, and Context in Bolivian Mormonism', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 40, no. 4 (2007), 47–71; Dean R. Louder, 'Canadian Mormons in their North American Context: A Portrait', *Social Compass*, 40, no. 2 (1993), 271–290; Thomas W. Murphy, 'Reinventing Mormonism: Guatemala as Harbinger of the Future?', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 29, no. 1 (1996), 177–192; Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia*. *Mormons in the Pacific Series* (Laie, Hawaii: Institute for

following questions are reflections which should also be read as suggestions for further research.

1 - 'The' or 'a' gospel culture?

Texts I have referred to use either the definite or the indefinite article: 'the' gospel culture or 'a' gospel culture. The former refers more to a unique construct. In the perspective of 'antagonistic isolation', the gospel culture is considered as an enduring, impregnable sanctuary which harbors 'light and truth'. In the 'broad inclusion'-approach, there is also only one gospel culture, but it includes all the good and positive from any other culture.

'A gospel culture' refers more to a construct where several gospel cultures can exist after or next to each other. In subsequent 'dispensations', a gospel culture assumes changing forms, even if the core is similar. In Nibley's view, the city of Enoch, in its perfection, had a gospel culture different from that of ancient Israel under the Law of Moses, with its elaborate laws and rituals. The gospel culture that the early Christians developed struggled to free itself from that law and its traditions. The Restoration through Joseph Smith in the 1830s created its own gospel culture, while restoring elements of previous ones. Also that culture can be seen to have evolved since its early manifestation.

In the perspective of 'selective appreciation', each Christian entity possesses its own gospel culture. The Mormon claim to its particular gospel culture does not exclude the existence of a Catholic gospel culture, a Southern Baptist one, or a Jehovah's Witnesses'. Further refinements could discern the gospel culture of Opus Dei or of Malankara, and hundreds of others with their own characteristics. It implies that also within Mormonism different Mormon 'gospel cultures' could be distinguished.

Polynesian Studies, Brigham Young University-Hawaii, 1991); Jiro Numano, 'Perseverance amid Paradox: The Struggle of the LDS Church in Japan Today', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 39, no. 4 (2006), 138–155; Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, 'Être Français dans une Église d'Origine Américaine: les Mormons de France', in *Les Mutations Transatlantiques des Religions*, ed. by Christian Lerat and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2000), pp. 279–308; Grant Underwood, 'Mormonism, the Maori and Cultural Authenticity', *The Journal of Pacific History*, 35, no. 2 (2000), 133–146; Walter E. A. van Beek, 'Ethnization and Accommodation: Dutch Mormons in Twenty-First-Century Europe', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 29, no. 1 (1996), 119–138.

2 - What makes a religious culture and how does Mormonism fit?

In simplified terms, a religion draws its identity from a combination of beliefs and practices. Beliefs refer to content – verbally expressed in doctrine, history, commandments, values, expectations, etc. Practices refer to acts – expressed in worship, rituals, liturgy, ceremonies, sacrifices, etc. Beliefs normally explain practice, and practices remind adherents of beliefs, such as the commemoration of events on a religious calendar or the ceremonies accompanying life's hallmarks – birth, rites of passage to age groups, marriage, and burial. Beliefs and practices aim at experiencing transcendence and at impacting personal life. The more a religion is institutionalized, the more its beliefs and practices are codified and regulated in orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Both beliefs and practices evolve over time. Within a mother religion, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism, they also vary according to internal branches. The relative weight of each main component, belief or practice, is different from religion to religion, and from individual to individual. When a religion has rituals as the main part of its religious service, with little or no verbal explanation, the emphasis is on practice. Religious services with long readings and sermons, appealing to reason, give more weight to content – hence to beliefs. Where does Mormonism stand in this balance?

In most traditional religions, the study of content is the domain of a limited contingent of theologians or clerics. For the mass of believers content is mostly limited to essentials related to practices. Even if content is voluminous and studied by many faithful, such as in Judaism or Islam, it forms a fixed package, settled in the past. In Mormonism, content is not only a major attribute, but it also is not definite: additional scriptures, the recent teachings of living prophets, and the general conference talks provide a stream of supplementary content. The principle of 'continuing revelation' promises more and can also alter past content. The discussion of this content, in numerous talks and lessons, is at least as dominant as practices. The early decades of the twentieth century saw a vast intellectual substantiation of these Mormon beliefs in books by, in particular, James E. Talmage, John A. Widstoe, and B. H. Roberts. Translated into other languages, they formed a prime source of doctrinal and historical knowledge for thousands of converts. In Mormonism the excitement, which expansive doctrinal and historical information brings to personal study and to talks and lessons, functions as a kind of cognitive ritual to feed religiosity. In the middle of the twentieth century a more confrontational trend followed – with authors such as Joseph Fielding Smith,

Bruce R. McConkie, Alvin R. Dyer, or W. Cleon Skousen. The church did not continue its support of that trend when the flaws of the harsher literature and the problems with personal interpretations became obvious. Correlation reduced church-sanctioned reading materials to selected essentials, safe and simplified, with an emphasis on moral precepts rather than intellectual insights. The entirety is still voluminous in the yearly curriculum for the various age groups. Anglophone members can, moreover, continue to enjoy a steady stream of Mormon books, now published outside the official channel: scores of apologetic, historical, exhortatory, or comforting material, for all levels, tastes, and needs, supplemented by independent journals and an abundance of internet sites. All by all, Mormonism remains very content-oriented.

As to practices, in many religions these imply rituals such as chanting, formulaic prayer, or physical movements; they often also incorporate sacral interiors, pilgrimages, religious attire, adoration or veneration of statues or symbols, incense, candles, and other paraphernalia. These distinctive acts impose, *by themselves*, an ingrained religious culture. Mormonism has no such ornate practices as it originated in an environment imbued with New England Puritan traditions. This origin explains the simplicity in worship, the form of the sacrament, fasting and testimony-giving, and strict observance of Sunday rest. 'Service to others' is a central concept in this pragmatic religion. Ordinances are quiet and short. None of the Jewish or Christian holy days, to which Mormons could also relate, knows an equivalent festive observance in Mormonism.⁶⁴ Even the temple ceremony, the most sacred of Mormon worship, is characterized by an egalitarian soberness without artificial means to stimulate a sense of the divine. The ceremony itself is geared at the transmission of content, in the form of instructions and restrained dramatization.

Still, Mormons have introduced some material symbols to sustain their religious identity. For Utah one such symbol is Pioneer Day — 'one of the most important public expressions of Mormon identity'.⁶⁵ Many Mormons of pre-correlation days, also members abroad, remember

⁶⁴ Note that the pageants at the Hill Cumorah, in Manti, or Nauvoo, the weekly Mormon Tabernacle Choir broadcasts, or the Days of '47 parade, are too optional and place-bound to be considered part of a worldwide gospel culture. But they are part of the American character of the church.

⁶⁵ Steven L. Olsen, 'Celebrating Cultural Identity: Pioneer Day in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism', *BYU Studies*, 36, no. 1 (1996), 159–78 (p. 160).

with some nostalgia other material tokens of identity – dance festivals, sport tournaments, roadshows, Primary and MIA-symbols, medallions, or bandlos.⁶⁶ The yearning for such objects explains the continued success of Mormon gadgets such as figurines, temple statuettes, pins, CTR-rings, or necklaces, but which are ‘non-official’ and only reach a small part of the Mormon membership.

To what extent do these Mormon beliefs and practices contribute, *by themselves*, to the establishment of a peculiar worldwide religious culture? Beliefs seem to have lost part of their past salience. Correlation has simplified teachings to a common denominator acceptable for the whole world.⁶⁷ More daring doctrines of the past are being demoted, thus undermining distinctiveness.⁶⁸ ‘Extraneous sources’ are now to be avoided in lesson material. But as malaise spreads among members who struggle with unsettled questions about doctrine and history, it seems church authorities continue their search for balance. For the individual Mormon much depends on personal interest to make use of information and resources outside of the official materials. Moreover, what is the effect of the wide divide between the amount available to Anglophone members and the rest of the world? Also for practices much depends on individual commitment, namely, a Mormon’s personal initiative to give sacral meaning to the ordinary religious acts, such as family prayer, individual and family scripture study, family home evening, or fulfilling

⁶⁶ A bandlo is a ‘band of felt worn around the neck like a long collar, to which were affixed symbols made of felt, plastic, or glass, representing participation and achievement in the last three years of Primary’: Ardis A. Parshall, ‘A Bundle of Bandlos’, *The Keepatitchinin*, August 31, 2008, www.keepapitchinin.org/archives/a-bundle-of-bandlos/ [accessed 12 September 2013]. Parshall describes these treasured souvenirs of Mormon childhood. See also Connie Lamb, ‘LDS Symbols of the Relief Society’, *Mormon Historical Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2013), 111–129.

⁶⁷ Mauss (*Feelings*, pp. 28–29) describes how teaching material of the 1950s ‘placed more emphasis on reasoning’, such as the Anderson Plan for missionary work, or ‘Parley P. Pratt’s *A Voice of Warning*, a substantial and powerfully reasoned tract of more than 100 pages’.

⁶⁸ For example, in interviews with the press, President Hinckley caused concern among some of the members by downplaying Mormon doctrinal traditions such as the Lorenzo Snow couplet, which he seemed to trivialize. See Michael W. Fordham, ‘Does President Gordon B. Hinckley Understand LDS Doctrine?’, *FAIR*, no date www.fairlds.org/authors/fordham-michael/does_president_hinckley_understand_lds_doctrine [accessed 4 August 2013].

‘callings’ to serve.⁶⁹ Mormon religiosity seems to be earned by personal action rather than by submission to age-old rituals, and by communal visibility rather than in private contemplation. In view of the massive problem of retention, could it be that this kind of gospel culture, hugely dependent on personal investment, does not grow deep enough roots *from itself*? Moreover, has correlation, by taking out of church life some of its distinctive content as well as colorful Mormon tokens of earlier years, undermined Mormon identity or, instead, has it brought Mormon identity to a higher level? More research could map the related data, also taking into account various personal variables in the international context.

3 - Does gospel culture imply Mormon culture and vice-versa?

Mormon culture, here defined as lifestyle, encompasses many external aspects – religious, social, educational, and physical –, while gospel culture highlights the religious life as such. To what extent can converts accept the gospel without adopting or having to adopt much of Mormon culture? Conversion to Mormonism entails observable behavioral changes, such as following the Word of Wisdom, paying tithing, and attending church. These can still be viewed as belonging to the essential gospel realm. But members are also expected to fulfill callings, attend related meetings, participate in activities, and serve as home and visiting teachers: ‘As they are baptized into a new faith, converts also come into a “gospel culture”. In this gospel culture, they encounter strict standards, strange words, and high expectations. They meet new people, go new places, and receive frightening responsibilities.’⁷⁰ Indicative in that respect is the standard question ‘Is (s)he active?’ to gauge good standing.

⁶⁹ In her experimental study of religious behavior among Latter-day saints, Cornwall found that ‘belief and commitment variables are most strongly associated with religious behavior’, more than social relationship variables and religious socialization. See Marie Cornwall, ‘The Determinants of Religious Behavior: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Test’, *Social Forces*, 68, no. 2 (1989), 572–592 (p. 583). See also Melvyn Hammarberg, *The Mormon Quest for Glory: The Religious World of the Latter-Day Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Hui-Tzu Grace Chou, ‘The Perceived Relationship between Life Events and Religiosity among Individuals Raised in a Mormon Community’, *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 13, no. 5 (2010), 437–451.

⁷⁰ John L. Hart, ‘Strengthening New Members’, *Church News*, 29 November 1997. The article comments on the First Presidency letter of May 15, 1997, addressed to all Church members to fellowship and involve new converts. The

The concept of gospel culture implies therefore a large measure of Mormon culture as lifestyle. The relationship between the two facets can also be worded as the well-known contrast between ‘the gospel’ and ‘the church’, the latter being representative of ‘the culture’. In a 1984 general conference talk, Elder Ronald Poelman stressed that ‘significant distinction’ – the gospel being the essence. He stated that Mormonism should ‘accommodate a broad spectrum of individual uniqueness and cultural diversity’. By so doing ‘we become less dependent on church programs. Our lives become gospel centered.’ Afterwards Elder Poelman was asked to redo his conference talk in order to blur this distinction between gospel and church. Some authorities felt that the distinction could be misinterpreted as if people ‘converted to the gospel do not need the Church’.⁷¹

The question can also be turned around: does an external Mormon lifestyle imply ‘living the gospel’? Active participation is no guarantee of a personal religious life, in particular when social or family pressures are the main determinants for involvement.⁷² Ironically, although it was never an intended implication of the term ‘gospel culture’, adherents of ‘just the culture’ are the third type of members whom Albrecht identifies as ‘cultural saints [who] are generally high in terms of their communal identification [...] but reject those doctrines that generally define one as a believing Latter-day Saint’.⁷³ In that sense, a statement like ‘I believe in the gospel culture’ or ‘I live the gospel culture’ could be a far cry from ‘I believe in the gospel’ or ‘I live the gospel’.⁷⁴

accompanying instructions require that ‘new members are to be called and trained to serve in Church positions as soon as possible after they join the Church’.

⁷¹ See, also for the quotation, Peggy Fletcher, ‘Poelman Revises Conference Speech’, *Sunstone*, 10 (1985), 44–45.

⁷² Rick Phillips and Ryan Cragun discuss how this happens in ‘dense Mormon communities’: ‘Contemporary Mormon Religiosity and the Legacy of “Gathering”’, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 16, no. 3 (2013), 77–94 (p. 85).

⁷³ Stan L. Albrecht, ‘The Consequential Dimension of Mormon Religiosity’, *BYU Studies*, 29, no. 2 (1989), 57–108 (p. 82).

⁷⁴ The dichotomy is often expressed as ‘belonging without believing’ (with its opposite ‘believing without belonging’). For the Mormon context of these contrasts, see Lori G. Beaman, ‘Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates: Religious Diversity and the Latter-day Saints Church’, *Sociology of Religion*, 62, no. 1 (2001), 65–86; Cope, ‘You Don’t Know Jack’; Michael McBride, ‘Club Mormon: Free-Riders, Monitoring, and Exclusion in the LDS

4 - How American is the gospel culture?

After the reversal of the gathering principle around 1900 and with permanent Mormon pockets in a number of countries, Mormon leaders started to stress the non-American character of the church. In 1937 J. Reuben Clark Jr. phrased it explicitly: ‘This is not an American church. This is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its destiny as well as its mission is to fill the earth.’⁷⁵ Next grew the concern to de-Americanize the church’s image and to cater to cultural differences. Since the 1960s correlation has been removing from church publications typical American lifestyle items. But the church cannot elude a number of American components. I would identify four which determine a socio-cultural atmosphere: historical location, authority, ideology, and behavior.

The historical location of the church’s origin and main development is in the United States. There would be no Mormonism without its localized past, from the First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the founding of the church, the dramatic stages of its persecution, up to planting Zion’s banner high on the mountains top – in Utah. The preservation and the retelling of that history are an intrinsic part of the message of the Restoration, including ‘Mormon historical tours’ with a sense of pilgrimage.⁷⁶ It contributes to the identity of a ‘home-grown American religion’ in which members worldwide are invited to partake. It ties in with America’s highlighting in the Book of Mormon and with the tenth Article of Faith – ‘the building of Zion on the American continent’. Many members abroad perceive Mormon Utah as an ideal society in America’s West, as idyllic as the Salt Lake Temple grounds and as majestic as the Conference center, home of the prophet and of tens of

Church’, *Rationality and Society*, 19, no. 4 (2007), 395–424. For a more general discussion, see Olav Aarts and others, ‘Does Belonging Accompany Believing? Correlations and Trends in Western Europe and North America between 1981 and 2000’, *Review of Religious Research*, 50, no. 1 (2008), 16–34; Vassilis Saroglou, ‘Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging: The Big Four Religious Dimensions and Cultural Variation’, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42, no. 8 (2011), 1320–1340; Jason Wollschleger and Lindsey R. Beach, ‘Religious Chameleons: Exploring the Social Context for Belonging without Believing’, *Rationality and Society*, 25, no. 2 (2013), 178–197.

⁷⁵ J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Conference Report*, October 1937, p. 107.

⁷⁶ See Sarah Bill Schott, ‘“Standing Where Your Heroes Stood”: Using Historical Tourism to Create American and Religious Identities’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 36, no. 4 (2010), 41–66.

thousands of members. Twice a year the general conference broadcast reinforces those breathtaking images. Perception studies would reveal interesting things on how Mormons abroad view Mormon heartland and how the hope of a once-in-a-lifetime visit to Salt Lake City equals a Muslim's intent to visit Mecca.

The second component is authority. The church is firmly managed by Americans. Non-Americans may slowly be added to the highest echelons but only, next to a flawless ecclesiastical curriculum, if they are sufficiently fluent in English and if their personality and background match the American corporate style of leadership. The regional headquarters around the world are staffed with enough Americans to ensure an American labor style in all endeavors. 'Salt Lake' controls all major aspects abroad, including financing, organizing missions and stakes, and building of temples and meeting houses. There remains a wide discrepancy between the Caucasian Mormon leaders in the top echelons and the substantial ethnic diversity in the membership.⁷⁷ Still, nearly all members abroad seem to accept this American leadership as a natural extension of the historical location in the United States and as part of a culture of compliance and respect.

Ideology as third component: apart from some limited communal experimentation in the nineteenth century, Mormonism has always been part of the evolving political and socio-economic realm of the United States.⁷⁸ Overall American church leaders have been explicit in their sustaining of the 'American way of life' and the 'American dream' — the free opportunities for personal development and the pursuit of happiness, including economic success and prosperity as a result. Their approach connects to America's messianic role in the world and to an abhorrence of socialism and communism. American ideology thus infuses the Mormon ethos with examples of self-actualization and

⁷⁷ For a study of this discrepancy, see Devyn M. Smith, 'The Diverse Sheep of Israel: Should the Shepherds Resemble Their Flock?', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 38, no. 4 (2005), 56–74. An update of the comparison would probably show little change since 2005.

⁷⁸ Underwood questions the stark contrast which analysts often make between a pre-1890 communal and polygamist Mormonism and a post-1890 mode of American assimilation. Even in the nineteenth century, he argues, most Mormons followed the prevailing American liberalism. Grant Underwood, 'Revisiting Mormon History', *Pacific Historical Review*, 55, no. 3 (1986), 403–426.

entrepreneurial values. Members abroad, especially those called to leadership positions, naturally adopt the same view and rhetoric. This ideology can be perfectly justifiable but in many countries the traditional view of religion emphasizes abnegation and self-denial. Mormonism thus invites members to mentally reposition themselves vis-à-vis what religion encourages to ‘also’ achieve. In fact, the frequent assertion that ‘the gospel is the solution’ to the nations’ problems refers not only to individual values, but also implicitly to the political and economic model of the United States.⁷⁹

Finally, the American component of behavior pertains here to conduct in interpersonal relations. My approach of this topic is tentative and research could probe this aspect further. Wherever the church has been established, white middle-class Americans were (and often still are) the originators, organizers, and first leaders of church units. Thousands of Mormon American families living abroad, as well as older missionary couples, impart their behavioral patterns in local wards. Missionaries, including those from other nationalities, are shaped by the rules and interactions of the American work ethos. Visiting authorities, who are American or Americanized role models, transmit behavioral patterns in their interaction with local leaders and members. Church-produced media depict the same models. These patterns include informality in social contact between genders and between ages; the way to approach strangers and start a conversation; the firm and somewhat longer handshake, with a smile and a direct gaze in each other’s eyes; the facial demonstration of assertiveness and commitment; eye contact during interviews and meetings; a certain jovial looseness in conducting meetings; the casual speaking style from the pulpit; the homogenizing dress and grooming standards (for women, conservative American modesty rules; for men and boys, the style of conservative American businessmen); the extolling of anyone as ‘wonderful’ and ‘great people’; and the praising of children and youth as ‘special’. Americans may find this topic trivial or irrelevant

⁷⁹ Cf. David Knowlton: ‘[The missionaries] frequently said that “the solution to Bolivia’s problems is the gospel”. By the gospel they tacitly meant the socioeconomic formation of the United States and Canada, as they understood it and as they sacralized it through their religion.’ David Knowlton, “‘Gringo Jeringo’: Anglo Mormon Missionary Culture in Bolivia’, in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. by Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 218–236 (p. 228).

because they perceive such ingrained habits as natural. Sorenson notes that American Mormons are ‘heavily influenced by U.S. patterns of thought and behavior’ and that they ‘in general seem unaware of the distinctions which do prevail between Mormon and American ways’.⁸⁰ But in most foreign countries it would suffice to go to the worship meeting of any other local, vested religion, or to any other kind of meeting for that matter, to understand the distance from behavioral patterns which have been adopted in a Mormon unit and which come, basically, from American conservative models. Of course, the patterns mentioned will be more contrasting in cultures that are more divergent from American habits. Because behavioral patterns help to form a community, they are significant in influencing the feeling of a worldwide gospel culture. Any ‘culturally adapted’ Mormon may thus feel immediately ‘at home’ in any church unit—in Singapore, Cape Town, Lima, or Helsinki.

Considering the four American components touched upon and the socio-cultural atmosphere they create, Mormonism, in its expansion to other parts of the world, could thus be called ‘an American world religion’.⁸¹ Overall, members abroad appear to be quite accepting of these American components of the church, which does not mean they concur with other American aspects or with U.S. politics in the world.⁸²

5 - What is (in)compatible with gospel culture?

The perspectives of ‘selective appreciation’ and ‘selective exclusion’ allow converts to keep from their original culture all the good that is not incompatible with Mormonism or to discard what is not compatible. The counsel applies in particular to members – now the majority in the church – who live amidst a local, dominant culture, which I will call

⁸⁰ Sorenson, ‘Mormon World View’, p. 27.

⁸¹ As in this book title: *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion*, ed. by Eric A. Eliason (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁸² The fact of joining a clearly ‘American’ church is already an indication of ‘American’ acceptance. Forms and degrees of this acceptance by converts and members abroad have been studied by Rigal-Cellard, ‘Être Français’; Alexina Delvaux, *Contribution à l’Étude des Saints des Derniers Jours en Belgique: Perspective Historique et Approche Sociologique* (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 2012). I am not aware of similar specific studies applied to other parts of the world. The perception is likely somewhat different in Latin American countries, where the appeal of Mormonism is (also) tied to identification with the Book of Mormon world.

the 'host culture'. Abiding by the counsel seems a simple matter. Since a host culture itself expects obedience to the law and to civic behavior, normally only a few explicitly Mormon traits will require special attention, in particular the law of chastity, the Word of Wisdom, and Sabbath observance.

However, many facets are not that clear cut. As mentioned, Okazaki defends the viewpoint that principles of the gospel are also found in other cultures. If a cultural practice reflects that principle, she deems participation acceptable, even if apparently deviating from usual Mormon standards. Her examples are worship at the Buddhist household shrine and participation in fun Sunday activities with non-Mormon family members. The rationale is to not offend non-Mormons and to be willing to contribute to their happiness. Quite a few examples of such principles can be given. What if the principle of welcoming guests includes offering a small alcoholic drink? In some cultures, refusing it would be equal to refusing to smoke the peace-pipe in the historic context of a negotiator in an Indian camp. What if the principle of filial service requires taking your old non-Mormon dad to the Sunday afternoon soccer match of his beloved local club and staying with him, joining in the cheering to make him happy? What if the rules of hospitality and etiquette, when inviting non-Mormon friends over for dinner, include serving wine? Stories in church magazines sometimes mention examples of similar 'ethical' choices: invariably the Mormon stands up for principles and refuses to break the Word of Wisdom or Sabbath observance. These examples, drawing on clear-cut lines, are proper for their purpose. Mormons seldom hear examples, set in more ambiguous situations, where the principles of tact and tolerance require nuancing and where showing sensibleness can be more indicative of Christian charity.

Noteworthy in this context are different cultural norms for certain virtues or standards, which influence the assessment of compatibility. Modesty is a prime example. In a puritanical environment, nudity is associated with sex. Not so in Mormon wards in Finland where a priesthood sauna night is considered a great social activity.⁸³ In some African regions women perform joyful dances with naked breasts, perfectly acceptable in the culture. In some countries church members are naturists: they do not understand how their relaxing family vacation on

⁸³ Norbert, 'High Priest Sauna Night', *By Common Consent*, 5 September 2007, www.bycommonconsent.com/2007/09/high-priest-sauna-night/ [accessed 11 January 2008].

the beach, in full harmony with nature, would be in violation of any gospel principle. In a ward in Belgium, the Relief Society sisters once choose as a weekday social activity to watch the film 'Calendar Girls' in the chapel. Their focus, culturally determined, was on the positive social message of the film and the fun scenario. It did not cross their minds that others would think of the film as dealing with female nudity and be offended over it. This item also raises the question of film ratings, which differ from country to country. Portrayed 'casual' killings, which so often occur in American action movies, and which children in the United States are allowed to watch under a G-rating, can, in another cultural setting, be considered more shocking and unsuited for children than brief soft-core nudity in a love scene, which would get an R-rating under CARA. The refusal of Brigham Young University to display *The Kiss* by Rodin is an incident that members abroad (as well as many in the United States) deem inconceivable, as they and their children grow up with a natural appreciation for nude art without sexual connotation.⁸⁴

How do these apparently more 'lenient' Mormons manage to reconcile their own cultural norms with general church norms in case of divergence? Sometimes Okazaki's 'principle criterion' is applied, usually without drawing attention. Christian Euvrard discovered that many French Mormons find a pragmatic balance between Mormon exigencies and their own cultural identity.⁸⁵ Knowlton observed that in Bolivia the 'vibrant, active, syncretic [Bolivian] Mormonism generally passes unseen before the apparent uniformity of standardized chapels, routine meetings, and white shirts'.⁸⁶ Murphy confirms the same for Guatemala.⁸⁷ Van Beek answered the question 'Mormon Europeans or European Mormons?' by deciding on the former because 'their national (and by extension European) identity comes first, sharing the values and norms

⁸⁴ 'BYU Bans Rodin Nudes', *Sunstone*, November 1997, 76–77. Even if BYU allows the viewing of nude art in art classes and in study abroad programs, there is no display of 'normal' nude art in its public areas.

⁸⁵ Christian Euvrard, 'Socio-Histoire du Mormonisme en France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 2008), p. 497.

⁸⁶ Knowlton, 'Gringo Jeringo', p. 221.

⁸⁷ Thomas W. Murphy, 'Guatemalan Hot/Cold Medicine and Mormon Words of Wisdom: Intercultural Negotiation of Meaning', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, no. 2 (1997), 297–308.

of their society before those of the LDS Church'.⁸⁸ Carine Decoo came to the same conclusion from a study of attitudes among Mormon women in Europe: these women reflect the gender norms of their country's culture, rather than 'Victorian' church traditions.⁸⁹ No doubt anywhere in the world, also in the United States, some Mormons play the accepted deferential role toward church authorities, while quietly doing some things 'their own way'.

However, this guarded independence is certainly not representative for all the layers of Mormon membership abroad. Indeed, many members focus on religion as a set of restrictions affecting daily life. New converts often feel a need for precise answers in the determination of (in)compatibilities. Frequent queries have to do with the Word of Wisdom and Sabbath observance. These uncertainties often stem from situations hardly known on the Wasatch Front. For example, in many countries, as well as in other parts of the United States, Sunday is a prime time for wholesome recreation, as authorities offer free visits to museums and exhibitions, to art festivals, folklore happenings, concerts, and lectures. Sunday is the day for enhancing community life and cultural enrichment, with special emphasis on families, for whom many public activities are designed.⁹⁰ Mormon judgment tends toward rigor: better err on the safe side and not participate.

6 - *To what extent is inclusion of local culture possible and desirable?*

The preceding question dealt with ambiguities at the individual level and mainly when Mormons interact with non-Mormons. But what about introducing local culture in the bounds of church life? Such introductions – heeding the counsel 'Keep every good thing you have' – could differentiate gospel culture from place to place. In 1973, Sorenson thought that, through correlation, 'required beliefs are reduced to the essential minimum, in part in recognition on the part of the authorities

⁸⁸ Walter E. A. van Beek, 'Mormon Europeans or European Mormons? An "Afro-European" View on Religious Colonization', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 38, no. 4 (2005), 3–36 (p. 20).

⁸⁹ Carine Decoo, 'Mormon Women in Europe: A Look at Gender Norms', paper given at the conference *Women and the LDS Church: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, University of Utah, 24–25 August 2012. Publication forthcoming in a reader with conference contributions.

⁹⁰ In fact this festive and entertaining function of Sunday comes from older Christian traditions. See Craig Harline, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011).

in Salt Lake City of the need for cross-cultural adaptation of the gospel message'.⁹¹ In an extreme interpretation of this approach, such cultural decentralization suggests discarding all Americanisms, defining only the 'core' of Mormonism, and then allowing regional or national Mormonisms – Pacific, Japanese, Siberian ... – to be built around the core according to their traditions.

There are drawbacks to such a proposition. First, what would be the common, essential core with still sufficient Mormon distinctiveness? As noted above, it seems that church authorities are still seeking that balance. Second, the proposal identifies local cultures from territorial stereotypes. Indeed, what would be 'typically' Polynesian, Brazilian, or Dutch? Any territory is further subdivided in smaller zones with their own identities, down to the level of city sections, neighborhoods, and social groupings. The fragmentation would be filled with contention over adaptations to local Mormonisms. Third, various forms of Mormonism would open a Pandora's box as to who is more or less orthodox and who deserves not to be called Mormon anymore. Fourth, one central aim of the gospel is precisely to make divisive entities fade away. We do not want Tutsi versus Hutu Mormons, nor Kosovar versus Serb Mormons. Fifth, through conversions among immigrants, in many countries the Mormon Church is already a melting pot. In fact it is in those multicultural wards and branches that a non-nationalistic, multiethnic Mormon society may be emerging without divisive orientations. Above all, as the church expands, church leaders are anxious about unity for fear of break-away groups and schisms. To maintain unity, uniformity and central control are considered prime conditions. The general effects of such an approach can be viewed as positive. 'The church is the same all over the world' is indeed a potent reassurance of belonging. As more people travel around the world and more immigrants disembark, the assurance of finding a standard Mormon meetinghouse where people and practices are familiar is heartening.

⁹¹ Sorenson, 'Mormon World View', p. 24. See also Armand L. Mauss, 'Can There Be a "Second Harvest"? : Controlling the Costs of Latter-day Saint Membership in Europe', *International Journal of Mormon Studies*, 1 (2008), 1–59. Mauss discusses possibilities of selective adaptations (pp. 40–48). 'Cross-cultural adaptation of the gospel message' is a more incisive process than 'transculturization', which only asks to change settings in stories and examples.

But correlation and uniformity can also lead to blandness and indistinctiveness. To what extent can local culture be allowed to add color to church life without endangering unity? Normally a local culture — with its way of life, manners, traditions, art, music, history, language, symbols, and interests — overwhelmingly contains good elements that provide cohesion and identity, safety and trust. In this encounter between the two so-called cultures — gospel and local —, many features of the local culture will simply be part of church members' lives without creating any conflict. But, again, at a certain point we enter a gray zone. Problematic items deal with 'good' customs that somehow penetrate the religious realm — meaningful traditions that cannot be called 'contrary to gospel principles', but which would raise eyebrows if followed by Mormons. Can former Catholics keep the family crucifix on display in their home? Can converts in the Orient keep an ancestral home shrine and its rituals? Can converts from Judaism keep a mezuzah on their front door and at Passover have the Seder ceremonial evening meal? These are questions for the privacy of their home. Things become more sensitive on church grounds. Can Latino members celebrate quinceañera — a girl's exceptionally festive fifteenth birthday — with an appropriate fireside-type service in the chapel (to approximate the special Catholic Mass at this occasion)? Can Congolese members conduct a funeral service with jazzy accompaniment and dancing — so vital for their sense of community in the face of death? Can former Catholics who long after the delight of the Midnight Mass organize a Mormon variant in their chapel? All of these examples can be tied to gospel principles according to Okazaki's 'principle criterion'.

From my experience, the tendency of most local leaders will be to prohibit such cultural incursions into Mormon territory, simply because these do not match predetermined standards of acceptability. Or, in case of hesitation, they find it safer to turn down requests. However, this tendency to enforce uniformity can lead to the prohibition of traditions that could be perfectly acceptable in the daily lives of members. A *Church News* article on Nigeria mentions that a challenge for leaders 'is that of helping new converts shed their tribal customs and traditions and bring their lives to conform with the culture of the gospel'. The article tells of members who, by giving up some (unidentified) traditions, create such a rift with their non-Mormon parents that these do not consider them their children anymore. The local church leader is quoted with the conclusion: 'That creates a lot of pain, but some members have decided

to do that. It is really very hard. But the members are definitely blessed for this sacrifice, because they are free from bondage.⁹² The problem with such information is that the reader has no idea which traditions were at stake here. In what respect were such traditions 'bondage'? Perhaps some could have been kept instead of tearing families apart?⁹³

There may indeed be reasons to be more lenient and to establish helpful criteria. First, for the individual and the family, a number of traditions belong to a cultural heritage that shapes fundamental identity within the local community. When such traditions are uplifting and have nothing detrimental in relation to the gospel, proscribing them could create voids that the church cannot fill. Among these traditions, next to examples given above, are communal festive events on historical remembrance dates. Can Mormons participate in these events when they occur on Sundays? A particular example would be forms of yearly 'children's days', which are celebrated in many countries in various forms and on divergent dates, connecting the community through their activities and excitement. Sometimes such festivities have a religious origin (e.g. Sinterklaas in Holland and Belgium, la Befana in Italy). Prohibiting Mormon children from participating in such events, not only can be socially upsetting to them, but it may also develop a rejecting, fundamentalist outlook toward society. In contrast, being both a 'good Mormon' and an integrated member of the local culture, without transgressing any norm of the church, will probably contribute to the development of a more balanced personality.

Second, having church members participate in local traditions can, certainly in critical situations, signal an important message to the host society and its leaders. The church wants good relations with civil authorities. But many governments look at 'foreign' religions with suspicion, in particular when these religions stress their separateness. For example, in many West- and especially East-European countries, Jehovah's Witnesses are viewed as a threatening cult, mainly because of their

⁹² John L. Hart, 'Nigeria: Blessings of Gospel Lift a Prepared People', *Church News*, 14 March 1998.

⁹³ Assessing different cultural traditions is also complex. For example, Elder Oaks rejected as 'negative' the African tradition of the bride price because it often obliges young returned missionaries to postpone marriage until enough money is raised (Dallin H. Oaks, 'The Gospel Culture', *Ensign*, March 2012). But in many African regions the bride price provides economical balancing for the loss of a female working force, its negotiation rituals serve in-law families' bonding, and later on it serves as divorce disincentive.

disengagement from the surrounding culture, as they refuse to celebrate days like Easter or Christmas, and even ban birthday parties. Such societal disconnection is interpreted as cultic behavior. Participation in the local culture, on the other hand, is viewed as commitment to broadly shared community values.

Third, taking into account the ethnic diversity of many Mormon units abroad, with their immigrant converts from various cultures, the introduction of these people to traditions of the host society can help them better integrate. Quite often these people have the Mormon unit as their only connection point with the host society. Integration of immigrants is high on the agenda of governments. A Mormon unit can contribute to that integration, but to do so, it needs to include components of the local culture among its activities.

A fourth argument, in some cases the most important, concerns non-Mormon family members. The conversion of a family member to a 'foreign' religion is, in many countries, sensed by the rest of the family as a betrayal of the deepest cultural heritage. The larger the breach in beliefs and practices between that heritage and the other religion, the more heartrending it can become. In cult investigations by legal authorities or anticult organizations, one of the characteristics for determining cult status is the degree to which it severs the believer from family and society traditions. So there is particular value in keeping certain local traditions alive in Mormon units abroad, at which non-Mormon family members can also feel at ease.

If the above arguments are convincing, some guidelines would probably be in order. The general statement that everything can be kept that is 'not incompatible with the gospel' leaves much room for interpretation and hence for inconsistent decisions and disagreements. A first step in such guidelines could be protective, such as the maintenance of the worldwide standard meetings (e.g., no local liturgical additions) and the distinction between the official church realm and the sphere of temporarily and locally permitted practices of local culture. Next I can only suggest questions. Should each proposal be assessed on a one-by-one basis, to be approved on a multi-stake, national, or regional level for the sake of coherence? Should proposals pertain only to major cultural items that apply to large geographical entities in order to avoid fragmentation over little issues? Or should the whole matter be kept very local and casuistic, only sustained by an acknowledged greater tolerance at the top? Some will fear that guidelines lead to overregulation, others that too

much freedom will lead to incongruent decisions and disarray. Whatever the viewpoint, the present lack of any parameter is not helpful either.

7 - Is 'culture' a good term to apply to the gospel?

At the 1976 Symposium, Sorenson took exception to the use of the term 'culture' as an identity marker related to the gospel. His wariness stems from the multiple meanings that can be given to the term 'culture' and from the fact that people have multiple cultures, pertaining to gender, family, age, profession, social level, region, and more. Such variety may lead, within groups, to 'similarities in behavior, thoughts, and worldview', but on an individual level these similarities will vary according to the circumstances. Sorenson concludes: 'I do not think that culture, as that term is used by most social scientists, is the same thing as the gospel. I do not think there is a gospel culture as such. Ultimately, I believe culture will be transcended when men have the spirit of truth in its fullness'.⁹⁴

In other words, this perspective represents the most exclusive position: there is the gospel, and all the rest is culture, because the gospel by definition transcends all cultures which are human-made. As early as 1928 Elder Levi Edgar Young contrasted human cultures with the gospel, which he defined as a non-culture: 'The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a scheme of culture or a system of philosophy; but a Religion, fulfilling the law and the prophets, enforcing the obligations of duty, and pointing to the glory of the Cross.'⁹⁵ In a 1979 *Ensign* article, Eric B. Shumway notes: 'Gone are the days when we saw the gospel as a culture itself, usually characterized by Utah's lifestyle and psychological references. We see now that the gospel embraces a set of spiritual values that transcends cultures'.⁹⁶

Such a view finds a parallel with how the Christian message had to unshackle itself from Jewish culture to become a-cultural:

For Paul, the Law of Moses was no longer a part of the gospel

⁹⁴ John L. Sorenson, 'Comments on Reynolds "Cultural Diversity in the Universal Church"', in *Mormonism*, ed. Tullis, pp. 28–32 (p. 31). See also Sorenson, 'Mormon World View', pp. 27–28.

⁹⁵ Levi Edgar Young, *Conference Report*, April 1928, p. 54.

⁹⁶ Eric B. Shumway, 'Bridging Cultural Differences', *Ensign*, July 1979, 67–71 (p. 70).

of Jesus Christ. Instead, it was merely a sign of cultural identity for the Jewish Christians – and the implicit message of Paul’s teachings is that the separation between gospel and culture should be maintained when one takes the gospel to the world.⁹⁷

The question ‘What is the gospel?’ immediately evokes Christ’s message of salvation, hope, and love, with all the transcendence it entails – ‘our Heavenly Father’s plan for the happiness and salvation of His children’⁹⁸ or ‘a body of knowledge essential to man’s ultimate wellbeing’.⁹⁹ But does the question ‘What is the gospel culture?’ bring to mind the same awe-inspiring answers? Culture evokes applications and lifestyle. ‘Gospel culture’ thus tends to generate conceptual shifts in relation to the gospel itself. The term may be understood as a type of societal framework surrounding beliefs and practices – a framework of which the nature and the boundaries are open-ended, but which can also be narrowly defined at will. David Knowlton conveys this ambiguity by stating that the development of a Mormon ‘supranational’ identity ‘has involved an intense cultural project of separating, winnowing, what could be called the gospel from what could be called culture’. The gospel thus requires all members, in any place, ‘to leave behind their cultures for this new, more focused gospel culture, or to see it in tension with the ways of the Lord’.¹⁰⁰ For Knowlton the separation from culture is still a ‘cultural project’ and the result is still a culture. In short, ‘gospel culture’ is both evocative and elusive.

There are also translation problems with ‘gospel culture’, as the church offers the conference talks, such as those by Elder Oaks on the topic, in dozens of languages. Even in languages close to English, locutions such as ‘die Kultur des Evangeliums’, ‘la culture de l’Évangile’, ‘een

⁹⁷ Gaye Strathearn, ‘The Jewish and Gentile missions: Paul’s Role in the Transition’, in *The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Testimony: The 23rd Sperry Symposium on the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1994), 188–203 (p. 202).

⁹⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* (2008), p. 3.

⁹⁹ Sorenson, ‘Mormon World View’, p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ David Clark Knowlton, ‘Go Ye to All the World: The LDS Church and the Organization of International Society’, in *Revisiting Thomas F. O’Dea’s “The Mormons”: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffman and Tim B. Heaton (Salt Lake City: Utah University of Utah Press, 2008), pp. 389–412 (p. 404).

evangeliecultuur', or 'en evangelisk kultur' may evoke different connotations than in English. In German 'Kultur des Evangeliums' is a historical concept, the title of landmark studies by theologian Carl Albrecht Bernoulli. In distant languages the connotation can be even harder to render. Moreover, the religious sphere will remind some non-English speakers of the stem *cult* in *culture* – a root that can strongly surface when tied to 'gospel'. In its basic usage, the 'cult of a religion' is the body of its practices – etymologically the 'care' owed to the divine. English derived the word from French, and French has it from Latin's *cultus*, the way an individual cares, tends, *cultivates*. Nowadays in some languages the word 'cult' (in French *culte*, in German *Kultus*), refers not only to the worship services of any respectable religion, but also to the overall cultural dimension of such a religion, making it, for example in French, more plausible to translate 'gospel culture' by 'culte de l'Évangile' instead of 'culture de l'Évangile'. Christianity and Islam can thus be identified positively as global cults. The narrow and derogatory connotation of 'cult' appeared in nineteenth-century English, but that connotation is rendered as 'sect' in other languages.

Sorenson concludes somewhat resignedly: 'I just do not find culture to be a very useful term. Unfortunately, it has come into common usage, and we all suppose we know what it means'.¹⁰¹

THE ANTONYMY FACTOR: TOWARD FUNDAMENTALISM?

To review: launched in the 1970s, 'gospel culture' as a Mormon identity marker was given disparate meanings as it was juxtaposed to boundary-making with other cultures. Since the 1990s its most emphasized connotation is one of contrast to the 'culture of the world', a meaning which counters its original Mormon usage of intellectual and artistic worth. Both idioms, 'culture of the gospel' and 'culture of the world', entered into the non-gradable antonymy of good versus evil. This is a significant development. In non-gradable antonymy words come in mutually exclusive pairs, for example, 'alive – dead' or 'present – absent'. The negation implies the other: not alive is dead, not present is absent. In gradable antonymy, however, the words allow for a scale between the extremes. The antonymy 'cold - warm' can be expressed in gradation: 'arctic - freezing - cold - chilly - temperate - tepid - warm - hot -

¹⁰¹ Sorenson, 'Comments on Reynolds', p. 29.

scorching'. The negation does not necessarily imply the other: 'not cold' is not by definition 'warm'.

Religious parlance, however, tends to present concepts in non-gradable antonymy, in line with the moral polarities: God and Satan, good and evil, virtue and vice.¹⁰² The deviation starts when this rhetoric of non-gradable antonymy, which is the easiest way to handle things, is also imposed on gradable concepts. For example, there is the view of only two kinds of members: active and inactive. In reality a wide range can be discerned, from 'fervent followers' to 'apostates'.¹⁰³ Another example: the posing of happiness versus unhappiness – the former as the sure result of gospel living, the latter as the certain consequence of sin – leaves out a number of in-between feelings, often temporary, bound to circumstances, like 'contentment', 'satisfaction', 'a dip', 'somewhat discouraged', or 'feeling overwhelmed'. Members may feel guilty or confused for not experiencing constant happiness, since the antonymy promises it as the natural outcome of their dedication.

The narrowing of the notion of gospel culture, from an amalgam of good aspects from other cultures to the stark contrast to a sinful world, exemplifies this inclination toward non-gradable antonymy. Such semantic reduction, with its concomitant increase of ambiguity intolerance, easily gravitates toward fundamentalism, here viewed as the militant imposition of strict boundaries based on claims of moral hegemony.¹⁰⁴ To

¹⁰² The scriptural 'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' (Rev. 3:16) comes to mind. Or: 'He that is not with me is against me' (Matthew 12:30) and 'For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things' (2 Nephi 2:11).

¹⁰³ See, e.g., the nine types discerned by Albrecht, 'The Consequential Dimension', 57–108.

¹⁰⁴ Religious fundamentalism plays out on various fronts. I concentrate here on its cultural dimension, with its 'focus on evil' outside its own realm. See Walter E.A. van Beek, 'Pathways of Fundamentalisation: The Peculiar Case of Mormonism', in *The Freedom to Do God's Will: Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change*, ed. by Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttill (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 111–143 (p. 111). For a broader view of religious fundamentalism, see Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, 'Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice', *Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2, no. 2 (1992), 113–133; Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, 'The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32 (2006), 127–144; Charles

obsessively contrast ‘gospel culture’ with ‘culture of the world’ has serious implications. Not only does it inhibit the ‘broad inclusion’-perspective, but it also shackles approaches that are open to the selective enclosure of cultural traditions of the host society. It further tends to ignore or dismiss societal improvements the world is making. In such an oppositional setting it becomes difficult to make suggestions for cultural mixing and to negotiate diversity. The ‘antagonistic isolation’-perspective wins, due to the now overriding antonymy factor in Mormon rhetoric. Carried to excess, the approach leads to clannishness and parochialism. Okazaki warns against this ‘tribalism of religious exclusivity based on our membership in the church’.¹⁰⁵ Another result is that the demonization of ‘the other’ spills over in political and social realms, leading to the rejection of ideological diversity and thus to intolerance.¹⁰⁶ This paradox in religious practice, brotherhood and bigotry combined, is a well-studied phenomenon in sociological research – ‘the trap that turns religious conviction into prejudice and in-group fellowship into out-group hostilities’.¹⁰⁷

Which factors seem to contribute to this kind of antonymic rhetoric and thus possibly to fundamentalization? I present the following arguments based on my personal impressions from years of observation.

One factor is the emphasis on repudiation as the main characteristic of a Mormon. The selected ‘best answer’ to the Yahoo question ‘What are the characteristics of a Mormon?’ is – given by a Mormon: ‘We don’t drink alcohol, coffee, or tea; we don’t smoke; we don’t chew tobacco; we don’t use illegal drugs; we don’t engage in pre-marital or extra-marital sex; we don’t view erotic material.’¹⁰⁸ In media interviews on their

B. Strozier et al., *The Fundamentalist Mindset: Psychological Perspectives on Religion, Violence, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Okazaki, *Disciples*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁶ Such critique is addressed to far-right-wing Mormons in Utah and Idaho. See, e.g., Benjamin Borg, ‘The Hidden Moderate Utah: The Political History of the War within the Mormon/Republican Relationship’, *The Hinckley Journal of Politics*, 13 (2012), 35–42; Paul Rolly, ‘LDS Legislators Bend to Tough Master’, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 July 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Harold Fallding, *The Sociology of Religion* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), p. 78.

¹⁰⁸ <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20091215150938AAEefyk> [accessed 10 September, 2013]. E-how gives a similar answer as to first characteristics of the Mormon lifestyle: ‘They eschew caffeine-containing products, such as coffee, tea and chocolate. They stay away from pornography and financial debt. They discourage what they believe are metaphysical vices,

faith, it seems Mormons are prone to point to these prohibitions, rather than mentioning uniquely constructive aspects of their religion.¹⁰⁹ As correlation has been emphasizing generic Christian beliefs and moral principles shared by all, it seems to become more difficult for Mormons to state their distinctiveness affirmatively and transcendently. A recent Mormon children's book, 'The Not Even Once Club', exemplifies this fixation on prohibitions as each child is asked to pledge, before being allowed into the exclusive club and be rewarded with candy: 'I will never break the Word of Wisdom, lie, cheat, steal, do drugs, bully, dress immodestly, or break the law of chastity – Not. Even. Once.'¹¹⁰ The ethical appropriateness of repudiation as such is not at stake here – of course, pledging to obey commandments is commendable. Problematic is the sole emphasis on negations and on exclusiveness and the potential effect on the formation of identity and of social distance. Repudiation easily reduces religion to restrictions and implies the self-righteous 'We don't do what all the others do' – hence elitism, antagonistic isolation, as well as condemnation of the other side.

In the international church, another likely factor of fundamentalization is the dominant voice of highly committed leaders in stakes and wards, as well as locally called area seventies, who are nearly always chosen from within strong Mormon families. The church sees much future in these dedicated, multigenerational families as natural incubators for growth and strength.¹¹¹ In any country where the church has been operating for several decades, such Mormon families, many of whom

such as cynicism and materialism. Devout Mormons also avoid alcohol and tobacco.' See www.ehow.com/info_8502362_characteristics-devout-mormon.html [accessed 10 September 2013].

¹⁰⁹ I became aware of this tendency in an overview of media reports related to the 'Mormon moment' in 2012. See Wilfried Decoo, 'The Mormon Moment Abroad: Thank You, Jim Dabakis', *Times and Seasons*, 13 December 2012. <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2012/12/the-mormon-moment-abroad-thank-you-jim-dabakis/>.

¹¹⁰ Written by Wendy Watson Nelson, wife of Apostle Russell M. Nelson, and published by Deseret Book, the book drew mixed reactions, showing the divide between 'antonymic' Mormons and the more nuancing. The pledge is found on http://deseretbook.com/pdf/Not_Even_Once_Certificate.pdf [accessed 12 September 2013].

¹¹¹ Bruce C. Hafen tells how Elder Maxwell got convinced, through international statistical data, of the 'key to having a multigenerational church' for retention and for children going on missions. Maxwell is quoted: 'We seek successive generations of grandparents, parents, and children who are

intermarry over various generations, start to resemble influential families of pioneer stock in Utah. Some of these members are recruited as church employees in administrative or Church Educational System functions, which require strict compliance. These ‘inbred’ Mormons, many of them fairly well-educated and relatively well-off, are those the church can always count on for callings and service. They are valuable resources in building the church abroad. This whole development is basically welcome. But the phenomenon also leads to the formation of close-knit circles and their dynasties of local and regional church leaders. The more lenient and liberal leaders are likely to be replaced over time by stricter ones, according to availability. It seems many of these ‘top layer’ members tend toward exclusivism as their intense church involvement makes all of their activities church-related and as their circle of friends narrows to like-minded fellow Mormons. They typically raise their children in a sphere of Mormon pride but also of complacency, with an embedded distrust of the non-Mormon environment. Their sermons and lessons often urge steadfastness by stressing enmity toward the ‘outer world’ and by cultivating fundamentalist attitudes. These firm leaders, who form a minority of the membership, naturally approach their congregations from their own exclusivist and full-Mormon-family perspective.¹¹² But they do not always seem to realize that the rest of the membership – in many cases the vast majority – belong to part-member families who need to negotiate their daily Mormon existence outside of the church. These are women without priesthood holders in the home and men who will never baptize a child or ordain a son. Many are single without Mormon family support – unmarried, divorced, or widowed. Single mom families abound. Others live in partnerships, but which the church does not condone. Nearly all of these ‘middle layer’ members are converts with active ties to a pre-Mormon life and with pre-Mormon identity features. Among these are also the underprivileged, the physically limited, and the mentally unstable who are greatly dependent on outside services and support. Overall this broad middle layer needs a viable Mormon identity, harmoniously embedded in the non-Mormon environment, rather than antagonistic isolation. Research would have to verify my impressions in this area, e.g.,

“grounded, rooted, settled”, (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:23) and sealed in the holy temple.’ In *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 2002), chapter 45.

¹¹² I observe this as a general trend. Of course, there are also more lenient leaders as well as rank-and-file members who display fundamentalist attitudes.

by surveying the feelings of local leaders from strong Mormon families as to social distance, in-group prosociality, and out-group derogation, compared to rank-and-file Mormons who are not part of such families.¹¹³

A third social factor contributing to antagonism toward the world is the reaction to failure of missionary work. An analysis of missionary journals and reports, as well as of conclusions in articles and books on church history in various countries, show how the general failure to find converts at a certain time and place is often blamed on the 'sins' or 'stiffness' of the people, on the opposition of the 'world', on relativism, materialism, and secularism, and even on the lack of descendants of Israel.¹¹⁴ Van Orden blames the lack of missionary success in Europe on the 'pornography, homosexuality, public nudity, prostitution, and general immorality' prevailing in Europe.¹¹⁵ All such preposterous reasons deflect attention from the church's own responsibility for failure. Research in various areas around the world could analyze whether there is a correlation between low missionary success and members' levels of antagonism expressed toward the outside world.

The process of isolation can be mutually reinforcing. The less time members find to interact with the host society, because of high demands within the church, the less opportunity they have to be involved in outside social and cultural activities. The host society, in turn, may find Mormons isolated in their own world of activities, which also causes

¹¹³ For such research among religious groups, see Joanna Blogowska and Vassilis Saroglou, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Limited Prosociality as a Function of the Target', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 50, no. 1 (2011), 44–60; Luke W. Galen and others, 'Perceptions of Religious and Nonreligious Targets: Exploring the Effects of Perceivers' Religious Fundamentalism', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 41, no. 9 (2011), 2123–2143; Juliette Schaafsma and Kipling D. Williams, 'Exclusion, Intergroup Hostility, and Religious Fundamentalism', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, no. 4 (2012), 829–837.

¹¹⁴ Examples of such laments are legion. See Michael A. Goodman, 'Elam Luddington: First LDS Missionary to Thailand', in *Go Ye into All the World: The Growth and Development of Mormon Missionary Work*, ed. by Reid L. Neilson and Fred E. Woods (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2012), pp. 241–259 (p. 252); Mark Grover, *A Land of Promise and Prophecy: Elder A. Theodore Tuttle in South America, 1960–1965* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2008), p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Bruce A. Van Orden, *Building Zion: The Latter-day Saints in Europe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), pp. 316–317.

distrust. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the temple paradox: during a short time the church uses the building of a new temple and its concluding open house as a major opportunity for public relations purposes. But once the temple is dedicated, such communication ceases and the temple, closed to outsiders, becomes forever symbolic of Mormonism's insularity and secretiveness.¹¹⁶

It seems these various factors make Mormon units increasingly self-centered, with an intense religious socialization among those of the same mentality, while alienating others. As Mauss remarks: 'Converts and lifelong members of a fundamentalist bent will find the church increasingly comfortable, whereas those of a more expansive mentality will find it increasingly uncomfortable.'¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

How do various concepts and factors contribute to what kind of Mormon identity?

The concept of gospel culture, as defined by Elder Oaks, tries to limit identity to the core of religious living – a 'culture of commandments and covenants and ordinances and blessings'. Indeed, as a stand-alone concept, gospel culture can be imagined as the sacred sphere wherein faithful Latter-day Saints apply gospel principles and reap the blessings thereof. That would be the essence of Mormonism as religion. The related individual identity would be feeling compliant with 'light and truth'. But do we then need an ambiguous term like 'culture' for what is basically 'living the gospel' in its most essential, a-cultural meaning?

'Culture' invites determinants. Pondering how a minimal gospel core would relate to a universal gospel culture or to pluricultural manifestations turns out to be a speculative exercise based on brittle definitions and delicate boundaries. The need for a clear physical and social framework for the gospel is unavoidable: that is what a church provides. Hence no gospel culture without a regulating church. For Joseph

¹¹⁶ See also Walter E.A. van Beek, 'The Temple and the Sacred: Dutch Temple Experiences', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 45, no. 4 (2012), 27–52. Among the radical suggestions I would make is to repeat temple open houses at least once a year or even to have the temple open on a number of Sundays, where groups from interested associations can view presentations on Mormonism or Mormon Tabernacle Choir broadcasts, or where people can come to read Mormon texts and meditate.

¹¹⁷ Mauss, 'The Mormon Struggle', p. 148.

Smith, the restoration of the gospel implied the restoration of the church with its organization and practices. That church, founded in the United States and closely tied to its American roots, defines for its members worldwide a sense of place, a socio-cultural environment, a lifestyle, and boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. What is the present impact of each of those four determinants on Mormon identity?

The Mormon ‘sense of place’ is established by standard-plan chapels and well-recognizable temples. To whatever Mormon chapel or temple Mormons go in the world, the building gives them an immediate feeling of genuine belonging. These measured buildings, determined by ‘Salt Lake’, reflect the expectation of a uniform Mormon identity. Standardization has supplanted the architectural creativity and diversity of former times.¹¹⁸

As I discussed, the socio-cultural atmosphere remains determined by American components of historical location, authority, ideology, and behavior. In that sense, the Mormon Church is an ‘American worldwide church’ – not a world religion in diverse manifestations.¹¹⁹ This Americanness of the church is still inescapable. At the same time, asserting that ‘This is not an American church’ is equally acceptable if the focus is on the universality of the gospel message. I believe we simply have to accept this dualism – innately American, prospectively universal – and bow to developments as they occur. It seems that most church members abroad are able to navigate between those two outlooks, with occasional tensions for individuals as they struggle to acclimatize to the dualism. Surveys should be able to pinpoint these tensions and their effects with precision.

The lifestyle expected from members is pervasive with its identical expressions of religiosity and activity, thus meaningfully contributing to identity. Overall, dedicated members find in this lifestyle stability, opportunities for progress, and happiness. Those positive effects, attested throughout the world, deserve to be highlighted. However, the social

¹¹⁸ See Paul L. Anderson, ‘Mormon Moderne: Latter-day Saint Architecture, 1925–1945’, *Journal of Mormon History*, 9 (1982), 71–84; Martha Sonntag Bradley, ‘The Cloning of Mormon Architecture’, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 14, no. 1 (1981), 20–31; Martha Sonntag Bradley, ‘The Mormon Steeple: A Symbol of What?’, *Sunstone*, September 1992, pp. 39–48.

¹¹⁹ According to Phillips, ‘Mormonism is a North American church with tendrils in other continents, and that calling Mormonism a “world religion” is premature.’ Rick Phillips, ‘Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism’, *Nova Religio*, 10, no. 1 (2006), 52–68 (p. 52).

pressure to conform is ubiquitous, including trivia such as dress and grooming standards. At some point the external identity requirements and the activity expectations can become suffocating for the less normative.

This article focused in particular on the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. From the six perspectives of gospel culture versus ‘the other’, the easiest one to adopt, the antonymic form, which stresses isolation and fear of the world, now seems pervasive in its contribution to Mormon identity. As far as I have observed in Europe, dedicated local leaders, usually from strong, multigenerational Mormon families, tend to set that tone. But must gospel culture by necessity develop an identity which alienates Mormons from the host culture and, often, from their non-member families? Or can one of the broader perspectives of gospel culture, which would include some, many or most good features from other cultures, still lead to a ‘sufficient’ Mormon identity? I have no clear answers to these questions. But I believe it is important that new converts, in particular for their retention, can adopt a viable Mormon identity, which does not exhaust them nor put them on a collision course with their non-Mormon environment or, in the church, with members of a fundamentalist bent. The same observation seems valid for long-time members or young people born in the church who feel increasingly uneasy with the isolating and exclusivist aspects of the imposed identity.

True, the model of ‘optimum tension’ between the church and the world asks for a balance between two strains: ‘the strain toward greater assimilation and respectability, on the one hand, and that toward great separateness, peculiarity, and militance, on the other’.¹²⁰ But this same tension, independent of where the church stands at one point in history, also plays out on the individual level and is subject to personal, familial, and communal circumstances. On that level, the tension might become excessive, also because the costs of Mormon membership differ around the world.¹²¹ Moreover, the tension is often only viewed in relation to the outside world, but frictions between individual members and their Mormon haven might be more damaging because religion, deep emotions, and a strong social network are involved. The consequences of the combination of tensions are sobering: in the international church, the majority of the members – 70 to 80 % – are not active, in various

¹²⁰ Mauss, *The Angel*, p. 5.

¹²¹ Mauss, ‘Can there be’.

degrees of disengagement.¹²² Any assessment of Mormon identity should also take into account those few millions of Latter-day Saints whom the church continues to count as members on its rolls. Among those, many have suffered or still suffer as they have become disillusioned, hurt, or confused within the church, or pressured or persecuted by their original milieu. Even many of the ones considered active face dilemmas and challenges and sometimes experience dramas related to their church membership. How do all these consider their Mormon identity?

To what extent are adaptations possible to improve viability and retention? As explained, I understand the need for worldwide uniformity in this still-early phase of Mormonism's existence. But for several reasons – familial, communal, political –, it may be commendable to allow aspects of the local culture a more visible presence in a non-official but still acceptable zone. In the more tolerant perspectives of gospel culture, church leaders have heralded cultural openness and acceptance of diversity. But when suggestions concretize, local leaders tend to withdraw into the antagonistic isolation model, mainly because they lack guidelines for allowable diversity. In particular where it affects relations with non-Mormon family members, there is a need for softer demarcations and more leniency, so that conversion and membership entail less discord and no tragic conflicts.

In the end it may be trivial whether we work with a concept such as gospel culture or not, or whether we succeed in neatly defining this culture or not. What matters are individuals and families. Indeed, in its worldwide expansion, a proselytizing church, which often disrupts families in the conversion process, has also an almost fiduciary responsibility to help ensure viability and happiness, for all concerned, in the construction of identity – or identities.

Armand Mauss summarizes it pointedly:

The success of twenty-first-century Mormonism as a 'new world religion' (Shipps, 1985; Stark, 1990) will depend largely on its ability to define for its adherents an identity that does

¹²² The 'inactives' thus form the broadest 'bottom layer' of a Mormon population pyramid. Above them is the middle layer of active members, many of whom do not belong to full Mormon families or are marginal in one way or another. The tiny top of the pyramid is formed by highly committed leaders chosen from within strong Mormon families. See Wilfried Decoo, 'Europe', *Oxford Handbook to Mormonism*, ed. by Terryl Givens and Phil Barlow (Oxford University Press, 2013, in press).

not depend on borrowings either from the American civil religion or from Protestant fundamentalism. Some retrenchment toward authentic Mormon traditions might make an important contribution to the reconstruction of a truly Mormon special identity, but beyond that lies the risk of fundamentalist excess and a loss of the intellectual expansiveness necessary for a truly universal religion.¹²³

¹²³ Mauss, 'Refuge', p. 38. Citations are to Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985) and to Rodney Stark, 'Modernization, Secularization, and Mormon Success', in *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*, ed. by Thomas Robbins and Dick Anthony, 2nd edn. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1990), pp. 201–218.