3-19-2012

I am a Mormon: Media, Ambivalence, and Identity in the Mormon Culture

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I AM A MORMON: MEDIA, AMBIVALENCE AND IDENTITY

IN THE MORMON CULTURE

By

Katherine Dahl Bergsten

B.A., Theatre Arts Studies, Brigham Young University, 2008

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
Theatre and Dance

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2011

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family who has always encouraged me to fulfill my greatest

potential. They have sustained and supported me through the achievement of all of my goals.

Without their enduring patience, I would not have had the diligence with which to persevere

in this endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to gratefully acknowledge Dr. Brian Herrera, my advisor and committee chair, for the continual support and lengthy months it has taken me to complete this thesis. His professionalism and open-minded nature has been an example of how I would like to continue to approach my academic career.

I also wish to thank my other committee members, Susan Pearson, and Dr. Megan Sanborn Jones for the advice and valuable insight they provided on this project. I am particularly grateful to Megan for taking the time out of her busy schedule to travel out of state and to be a part of this experience with me. This would not have been possible without the funding provided by the College Fine Arts, the Department of American Studies and the Department of Theatre and Dance.

To my sister and editor Erika, who stayed up until all hours of the night helping me through each step of the process. Your encouragement has meant the world to me.

To my formatter Susan, who made this all possible for me.

And finally to my husband Joe for loving me unconditionally, believing in me even when I didn't, and putting up with a pregnant wife under the pressures of graduate school. I could not have done it all without you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study how performance has influenced the

Mormon people in contemporary times and throughout history. This study examines various

influential moments in the history of the LDS church that had an impact in shaping this group

of people culturally. The thesis as a whole studies how the relationship with the media

within the religion has become an ambivalent one. The first chapter of the thesis

contextualizes the history of the church in order to analyze how performance has played a

role in contemporary culture. The second chapter examines specific performances in

contemporary Mormon culture. The performances analyzed include the "I am a Mormon"

campaign that has been the most recent missionary effort to come from the Mormon Church.

The third chapter compares these seminal moments in history and contemporary Mormon

culture to analyze the differences between the use of the media in the Mormon Church and

other Christian religions. Throughout the thesis the idea of identity and ambivalence are

further defined in relation to the church.

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Introduction

"But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" -- C.S. Lewis

Identity is often molded and shaped out of the trials that push towards growth. Identity is vital to one's existence. Knowing who we are and where we are going is necessary to create one's own road map and direction in life. The formation of identity is dependent upon many factors. Identity can be formed through various experiences, trials, and the forces by which we are influenced. The church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, otherwise known as the Mormon Church, though relatively young in the scheme of history has experienced a fair amount of identity formation and reformation through the experiences, trials and social influences that the church has faced throughout history. This essay examines the formation of identity by using examples throughout Mormon history into the contemporary era to observe how the media and performance has influenced contemporary Mormon Culture and its identity. Performance, although commonly referred to as theatrical, is the term I will use to refer to any instance where the performer is aware of the audience. In this case the media in all of its forms has been a vehicle of performance in shaping contemporary Mormon culture. The entire identity of the church has been based upon various performances throughout history. The relationship that the church has had with performance and the media however is a multifaceted one that comes with many caveats. This is an exploration of how the church has dealt with the powerful influence that the media has had on its members through the study of various influential moments in history.

The purpose of this essay is to examine various performances that have shaped contemporary Mormon culture. The first part of the essay contextualizes the historical

background that theater as performance has played within the LDS culture, and how that performance has shaped the Church's view and opinion on the contemporary idea of the media. This portion of the essay examines how unique and sometimes painful history has contributed to the formation of identity within the church. The second portion of the essay studies a more narrow aspect of contemporary Mormon culture, which is the use of modern technology and the media. I take a specific examination of how the current use of the new website Mormon.org speaks to the faith's strong belief in missionary work. I examine how these particular forms of media shape what the culture has come to know as its identity today. The third portion of the essay examines the use of technology and other Christian religions and how that has played a role in the shaping and formation of identity within the Mormon culture. Each parts acts as a component in understanding the aforementioned process of finding identity and the formation of an ambivalent relationship that the church has had with the media and performance since its early beginnings.

PART I:

East to Westernized: Theatre and Performance as the Early Beginnings

of an Ambivalent Relationship

Sigmund Freud coined the term ambivalence. In his study of psychology, he defined ambivalence as being pulled in psychologically opposed directions. This idea of ambivalence can be applied to several aspects of life. Homi Bhabha further elaborated on the term ambivalence as defined within the idea of mimicry. Bhabha described ambivalence of mimicry as being "almost the same but not quite." He referred to this idea of mimicry when talking about the difference between race and social class and how men are often pulled in two opposed directions. I add my definition of ambivalence as being pulled in two opposite directions. Often times these two directions can seemingly be opposing forces. Elinor Barber further defines ambivalence in her essay "Sociological Ambivalence" as being "continually investigated, especially by psychologists. Almost in the Aristotelian vein, Bleuler identified three types of ambivalence: the emotional (or affective) type in which the same object arouses both positive and negative feelings as in parent-child relations; the voluntary (or conative) type in which conflicting wishes make it difficult or impossible to decide how to act; and the intellectual (or cognitive) type in which men hold contradictory ideas." (3) With regards to the Mormon Church and its relationship with performance in the early days of its beginnings all three types of ambivalence are present and relevant.

Ambivalence plays a great role in the shaping of identity. The stronger we are influenced by differing forces and more likely we are to come to a greater sense of who we are as individuals. This has been the case throughout moments in history for the Mormon culture. There has always been a great emphasis on performance and how that can shape

one's identity. However, a sense of emotional ambivalence has always existed when referring to performance in Mormon culture. Because the definition of performance is so broad, this section will be focusing on theatre and dance.

As is common with any religious group, trial is inherent in the nature of faith. Persecution of organized religion seems to be a common theme throughout history. From biblical instances when Moses led the children of Israel out of captivity to the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jewish religion, there are always instances in history when trial and persecution has played an identity-shaping role for particular religious groups. Turning to a higher source of power for strength is what has historically buoyed up the persecuted. However, beyond the faith itself, there are other sources to which one can turn for consolation. For the Mormon religion, there were endless trials that shaped what the group is today. Through faith was vital to facing those trials, there were many other sources to which the early members of the church turned for solace. The role that performance played, particularly in theatre and dance, condoned cathartic experiences that shaped the relationship that Mormon Church still has to this day with performance.

The faith of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was strengthened in performance. Their strengthened faith is what ultimately allowed them to push forward through trials. Performance is compromised of many different factors and depending on the content can be considered in line with the teachings of the Mormon Church or it can go against it, therefore the idea of ambivalence is prevalent throughout the historical experiences that this faith has had with performance. The members of the church used performance to overcome these trials, but had to be selective in the content of performance as it was used to uplift and inspire. This has become an increasingly ambivalent relationship

throughout time as the common form of performance has strayed further and further from what would be considered appropriate.

Today the Mormon Church has over "13 million members in 176 countries [and is] the fourth largest Christian denomination in America"[1] As a larger Christian church, it is significant that performance has not only had such a strong influence on the history of this church but it continues to play a large role in the contemporary culture of the church. Theatre and dance has clearly shaped the culture of this unique group of people historically, but it continues to influence cultural practices today, particularly in productions and films that portray some of the trials that these people faced early on in their history. The power of theatre and dance is the focus of how the Mormons overcame trial, and became a building block in the shaping of the Mormon identity as it now stands.

Performance Inherent in the First Vision

The year was 1820. There was a young man the age of fourteen, named Joseph Smith, who was inquisitive about life and its nature. He wanted to understand which of all the Churches were right. Even his own family was divided. His mother went to one church while his father seldom attended another. He and his family lived in western New York during a time of religious excitement. He often found that many Christian faiths argued with one another about what was right. In many of the services he attended he found himself wondering why the leaders of those churches took great care to "prove the errors" of the other faiths. [2]

This time of trial led him to ponder "In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right, or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?"

(Smith, 48) These questions weighed heavily in the young boy's mind and it caused to study the bible as he did frequently, but there was one day in particular that the passage he read was pertinent to the struggles he was facing. In the book of James 1: 5 it reads "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (48) Joseph describes his experience "Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did, for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know."(48)

It was these feelings and thoughts that led Joseph to pray in a grove of trees near his home. He prayed on bended knee and asked to know which of the sects were right. Joseph's describes his experience as being difficult to believe. From that point forward he claimed to have seen God and Jesus Christ. He shared with many others that God had called him to be a prophet to lead his church in the modern era. This one event was only the beginning of what is now known as the Mormon Church and has sparked the interest of performance throughout history.

Because this event is so pivotal to the Mormon faith it is something that is celebrated often on the stage or on film. A short film produced by The Christ of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints entitled "The Restoration" depicts the experiences that Joseph Smith had up until he had the vision of God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. This form of performance has become a tool to build faith among those in the Mormon Church. This is also an example of why the church is drawn to performance. The ambivalence of the relationship that the church has with performance can only exist if the church has such a strong need for this type of

performance (particularly one of this nature that depicts an event that is considered sacred) because it facilitates growth within itself. This short film is used as a missionary tool to help in the teaching of hopeful converts, thus it is apparent that the church uses performance for its benefit. It is "drawn" to performance through emotional ambivalence because performance can help the church to grow, but performance can also be detrimental to the growth of the church when films are produced to draw members away from the church. Thus emotional ambivalence is in existence.

Joseph Smith became known to the members of the church as the prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and he eventually called twelve apostles to lead and guide the church with him. It was believed that he was guided and directed under divine inspiration on how to organize the Church. He taught doctrine from the bible and in latter years was believed to have translated new scripture. In reference to the new scripture he translated, known as *The Book of Mormon,* Smith described the book to be another testament of Jesus Christ that was a record of the people in the ancient Americas who waited for the coming of the "Messiah" or Jesus Christ. (Smith, 50) These records record Christ visiting the Americas and establishing his church there. The book compiled several books, as in the bible, of different generations and stories. These books were edited and put together by a man named Mormon. Thus why the church is referred to day as The Mormon Church. This book is the book of scripture that is still studied today hand in hand with the Bible by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The book has become one of the key points of the religion that sets it apart from other Christian sects. Because it is such a key part in the religion, the need to put it into performance has become prevalent.

Performing the *Book of Mormon* is another instance of the church's ambivalent relationship with performance. Rather than perform something that is "worldly" or of no religious nature, why not perform the key aspects of the faith and create experiences for audiences that are often for the purpose of building the testimony of the members of the church? The "Hill Cumorah Pageant" is a theatre pageant that enacts the story of the Book of Mormon.[3] This pageant has provided some key experiences in building the identity of the church.

Music is a key aspect of the church. In each hour of the three hour block of church meetings there is an opening and a closing hymn that is sung by the congregation, and often times there are musical numbers where a member of the congregation will participate in a special performance. Music clearly plays a key role in the LDS faith. In a book of scripture exclusive to the Mormon church it states "My soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D&C 25:12) This emphasis on music as well as the emphasis on the Book of Mormon makes the "Hill Cumorah Pageant" the perfectly themed performance to display the identity of the Mormon religion and to further amplify the complicated relationship that the church has with performance as it is something that can uplift, edify and essentially draw one closer to God, or it can do just the opposite depending on the content.

The relationship that the Church has had with performance continued on from the early beginnings with Joseph Smith, in fact some of the more commonly performed aspects of the Church have come from its earliest hardships and trials that the members faced as they chose to travel West to find a place they could call their own and establish their own roots. It

is these performances that are often melodramatic that affect the entire outlook of members of the church in relation to their identity within their very own faith.

Performance in the Early Days and Performing the Early Days

The early days of the church were rife with persecution. Joseph was persecuted for his beliefs and often mocked and scorned for claiming to have spoken with God and Jesus Christ. People often told him that God no longer appeared to man in this day and age nor was there scripture other than the Bible. He was considered blasphemous among other Christian religions for having made such claims. He never once denied his experience. "I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation." (Smith, 51)

At these difficult times for him and his small group of followers, he never ceased to be optimistic and find joy in the arts. It was this early emphasis that was placed on the arts and performance that shaped the Church's identity in a contemporary era. In the early years of the Church a news reporter requested that Smith explain to him what the beliefs of his faith were.[4] It was at this time that Smith wrote "The 13 Articles of Faith". In the last of the "Articles of Faith" he with the biblical apostle Paul claimed, "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."

At a time when the theatre was not always considered an "acceptable institution" Smith encouraged the members of the church to find joy in the theatre. The counsel maintained was that if it was a form of entertainment that could be considered "virtuous,

lovely, of good report, [and] praiseworthy" it was most certainly something that should be sought after. (61)

In *The Ensign* magazine, Robert Walker talks about the early days of the church and the encouragement that was placed on the arts. He said, "They [the arts] were a vital part of Zion. As early as 1834, Assistant President of the Church Oliver Cowdery wrote, 'We believe in embracing good wherever it may be found; of proving all things, and holding fast [to] that which is righteous.'"(15)

As the church began its humble beginnings, there were not many members and most in the community did all in their power to stop the development of the church. It was not uncommon for members of the church to be driven out of communities that they built. Their prophet instructed the members of the early church that it would be necessary to head out West to find "Zion" where they could live in peace. The members were faithful amidst the trial of uprooting their entire families and trekking through the worst conditions imaginable. Many times the church would settle and establish communities and many times they were driven out of their communities by those who disagreed with their beliefs. It was during these times of trial that the church and its members were buoyed up by the power of performance.

It was understandable that there was a need for relief to these members. *History of the Church* explains all the many travels and problems that the church faced as it progressively moved to attempt to find a community where they were not judged nor persecuted for their beliefs and differences. As the Church was still in a tenuous first phases of starting the religion, its identity had yet to be shaped. The many moves that followed were identity-shaping experiences.

The Saints, or members of the church as they called themselves, traveled from Kirtland, Ohio where they were quickly driven out two years later. After Kirtland they found refuge in Independence, Missouri but were forced out in of the county in November 1833. From there the Saints moved on to Liberty, Missouri where the persecutions of the church continued. It was here that the prophet and his brother were held in prison and suffered terribly from the conditions under which they were held. It was three short years that the Saints were there before they were once again forced to leave. These experiences forced many of the members to question their beliefs, and whether or not all the persecution was worth it. The Church's identity was quickly forming as one able to endure hardship and long suffering.

From Independence the Saints fled to Far West, Missouri where things became even more heated. Members of the town did not like having a group of people come in and settle in their land. They did vicious things, and often burned farms, stole livestock and possessions of the Mormons. The governor at the time was misled to believe that it was the Mormons that were causing all of the contention and when he was asked to speculate himself what was going on, he chose not to, and instead decided to sign an "Extermination Order" making it legal to kill any Mormon who did not leave the county immediately. He wrote, "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state" (*History of the Church,* 3:175; emphasis in original). This would become another incident that has been widely performed from the early years, to contemporary representations. *The Work and the Glory*, a film based on the events of the early saints is one example of how the contemporary identity has been formed through performance of the aforementioned early trials the saints went through. The film was based off of a popular book series that was

written as fictional entertainment for members of the Church. Dramatizing the effects of the trials that they faced acts as a reminder of the sacrifices that early members made so that those who are members now can appreciate their heritage.

The cathartic spirit of performance was a huge part of the early days in the midst of these trials. The next place the saints went was a town called Nauvoo, Illinois. In the year 1839 in Nauvoo, the church members constructed a "Fun House" where social gatherings and various performances were held. [5] Here the prophet was able to attend and support the arts in such a way that he found appropriate. That is to say that it never involved scantily clad women, alcohol of any kind, or any material that did not edify and enlighten the mind. Because those that were members of the company were also members of the church, there were high morals and standards that to be maintained by members of the church. These productions were intended to lift one another and to find joy in the sharing of talents.

The trend of being a theatre going people began to grow as the church began to grow. Many new members were often drawn to the church because of the theatrical performances that were produced. Such was the case for Thomas Lyne. "When the Philadelphia tragedian Thomas A. Lyne was baptized by Mormon missionaries, he traveled to Nauvoo and starred in all his favorite roles supported by a Mormon cast."(Sowell, 97)   Lyne continued to be a strong influence on the theatre while in Nauvoo, and he continued to influence the leaders of the church to support the theatre. "Lyne's performances (he was both a producer and a star) reportedly drew large crowds to the Masonic Hall… which served as the Nauvoo theatre. It was Lyne apparently who steered Brigham Young toward his lasting affection for theatre, by casting him in the role of the Peruvian high priest in a Nauvoo production of *Pizarro* " *(*Givens, 146) Thus, Young's love for the theatre began.

The church had sent missionaries overseas, often to England, to share the joyful news that they had found Christ's restored church for modern day. Many of these members from England were so strongly converted that they wanted to meet the prophet and join the journey to find Zion. These people often brought with them the European love and talent for the arts. They were able to join in the development of the emphasis that was put on the theatre at this time in the church.

It was during 1843 and 1844 when the animosity began in Nauvoo. The prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Smith were taken prisoners at Carthage jail on June 27, 1844. It was at this jail that both he and his brother sealed their testimonies with their own blood as they were shot to death. Louisa Barnes Pratt wrote: "It was a still night, and the moon was at the full. A night of death it seemed and everything conspired to make it solemn! The voices of the officers were heard calling the men together and coming in the distance made it fall on the heart like a funeral knell. The women were assembled in groups, weeping and praying, some wishing terrible punishment on the murderers, others acknowledging the hand of God in the event."

This has also become an event that has been put into various forms of performance. Being an event so dramatic and shocking, it often attracts many members of an LDS crowd who then reflect on the sacrifices that have gone on before them. One of these events is a film that depicts the life of Joseph Smith. It shows what happens up until his martyrdom. Being the first prophet and founder of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith's life makes up much of the identity of the church be it doctrinally or socially. The events that shaped his life now shape the church. These types of events that are depicted within Mormon culture give the members of the church "faith boosting" experiences, and a better understanding of who

they are as a people. Performance, thus, becomes a tool to overcome struggle and confront the difficult aspects of life.

It was soon after Joseph Smith's death that Brigham Young was called to be the new prophet who led these Saints on their trek westward. He too was a big advocate of the theatre and encouraged the saints to find time each week to enjoy song, dance, and performance. This was especially important as they were traveling by foot and handcart all across the west. "The journey was arduous, but dancing was a favorite form of entertainment around the campfires as they crossed the plains. The dances always began with prayer and were usually held on Saturday nights, as the company did not travel on Sunday unless it was necessary to reach water." (Sowell, 97)

The Church in Utah

Once the Saints reached Salt Lake City there was much that had to be done to establish their community. They were starting with nothing. After having trekked across the northern edge of what is now the United States, they were much fewer in numbers and in supplies. Some families had only the clothing on their body and hardly anything else. They reached the desert and Brigham Young declared, "This is the right place" (*History of the Church)* as he made a mark in the sand and the people began to build up what they called Zion.

Communities were erected in an orderly fashion. The Saints named the land "Deseret" which is found in the bible as a representation of the honeybee to entail industry. They worked hard to build what they had long dreamed about. In this time of great production the theatre was not shirked. Just as the Saints had used performance and theatre as an outlet of creativity and joy while they traveled the plains they continued to focus on how

theatre and dance, as a form of entertainment, could continue to enrich their lives for the better.

After being in the valley only a mere year (1848) there was a bowery constructed that was used not only as a meetinghouse, but also as a theatre. [6] The practice of performing plays was held at a near equal level of the sanctity of Sabbath day meetings. Though the building was raised for functionality, it also became demonstration and symbol of the priorities that the early saints had as they first arrived in the valley. Truly they believed the theatre to be of such great importance that they built it before even the schools and colleges were built. Their prophet taught them that nothing was to come before God. However, he strongly encouraged all to perform and write plays because of the power that the plays had to instruct an audience for good and the power that the play had to lift one's spirit. (Young, 53)

This has put an enduring emphasis on what the Church believes about performance. The idea of performing in and being involved in performance was emphasized so much under Brigham Young, but only continued to be of great emphasis throughout time. One of the reflections of this emphasis was on the road show productions that each congregation across the church would organize and perform up until 1999. "Many Mormons who have grown up in the LDS church have performed in a road show at least once in their lives. People who later grew up to be bankers, lawyers and professors, willingly- even happily- participated in that uniquely Mormon summertime ritual: the road show" (Givens, 266) This tone of performance has continued to evolve since the nineties into the film industry and now with the use of the internet. All of this stems from the early emphasis that was placed on performance.

One of the first ornate and decorative buildings to be raised in the Salt Lake Valley was the Salt Lake Theatre. It was built in 1861 and became the new home for the Deseret Musical and Dramatic Society. (Sowell, 98) This society was formed
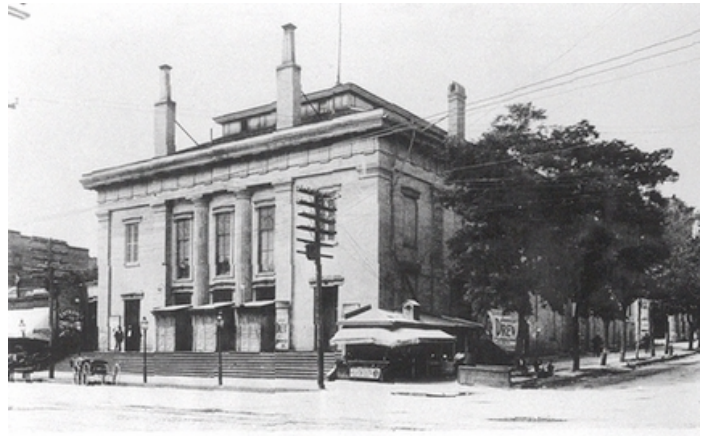
SALT LAKE THEATRE—Salt Lake City.

of a group of actors that wrote and performed plays that were often didactic moral plays. (98) The plays were undoubtedly influenced by the standards that were set forth in the gospel that they had chosen to live as members of the Mormon faith. Again, the idea of ambivalence was prevalent, as plays outside of the religious spectrum had no concern for teaching morals. The plays performed in the Salt Lake Theatre were carefully reviewed to follow the standards of the church. This theatre was said to be an edifice unlike anything else, other than those that had been seen in New York City or London. In fact it was the people that showed their dedication in building the structure. It was of utmost importance that there was a place where people could not only go to be entertained, but could come from afar and participate in the productions. It proved to be a community effort and all involved, which was the majority of the community, showed their belief in the importance of the theatre and performance that was wholesome and virtuous, by giving so much of themselves in order to have such a community gathering place.

> *From the beginning, the Salt Lake Theatre was a community expression, something like a medieval cathedral. Brigham Young himself announced the project and vigorously pursued its completion. At the time, Salt Lake City was a frontier outpost*

of 12,000 people. The telegraph had recently established rapid communication with the wider world, but no transcontinental railroad yet existed to freight supplies and facilitate construction of the building. Yet, before building an enlarged meeting hall for worship or completing the much delayed, religiously important Salt Lake Temple, the settlers erected the theatre, easily the largest and most imposing building in the community.

(Utah History Encyclopedia)

The prophet had a great influence over the members of the church. He loved the theatre himself and though he was not worshiped, he was revered and his opinion of the theatre reflected in the opinions of the members of the church he led. He was a supporter of the theatre in more ways than one. Not only did he advise the members of the church often on what was acceptable entertainment, but also he asked members of the church to go to the theatre and find the exalting power that lie within the arts. He also had several daughters that were a part of the Deseret Musical and Dramatic Society. Young was often quoted boasting about the good that theatre brings. When interviewed for the New York Times, he talked about what a grandiose structure that this theatre was and why he thought it was important for members of the community. At a time when the theatre was clearly looked upon as a practice for those with low morals or no morals at all, it was important for a leader of a church to prove what was so important and how the theatre could possibly convey an attitude of morality. Theatres were more commonly known for performances where men could see scantily clad women that were not dressed in the modest fashion of the day. This standard that existed when it came to the theatre was a difficult one to overcome, but as the head of the church ambivalently stood strongly for the side of moral theatre, and against the immoral

portrayals in other playhouses, he continued to set the tone for more than a century to come

and the church's stance on performance. The <u>New York Times</u> article stated "In New York,

in St. Louis, in Chicago no body would assert that the stage is a school of virtue, that acting

is a profession which a sober man would like his daughter to adopt. Young does not blind

himself to the fact that in claiming the theatre as a school of morals he has to fight against a

social judgment. An odor of vice as of a poisonous weed, affects the air of a playhouse

everywhere; though no where less offensively than in American towns." (Dixon, 9)

One of the main reasons Young advocated the arts so fervently was because he

believed it was a wonderful way to teach about propriety and sociality. He claimed, "If

placed upon a cannibal island with the charge of civilizing the inhabitants, he would

construct a theater." (Wheelwright, 43) Because of the unique outlook that the church held

towards the arts there were many who traveled great lengths to the theatre because of their

curiosity. Among them was Oscar Wilde who came to give a lecture. There were other

"Eastern travelers as F. H. Ludlow, who commented, 'I was greatly astonished to find in the

desert heart of the Continent a place of public amusement which, regarding comfort,

capacity, and beauty, has but two or three superiors in the United States.'"(43)

This general outlook became revered and looked upon by many in a much more positive light

than had been seen before. One theatre practitioner commented, "Sweeping as the statement

may seem, I do not believe the theatre has ever rested upon a higher plane, both as to its

purpose and in its offerings, than at Salt Lake City, the capital of Mormondom" (Leavitt,

404)

It was this kind of world influence up until the year 1900 that sparked several

movements in contemporary history in the Mormon culture. The influence from the prophets

continued but nothing like what was given by Brigham Young. To this day his influence has continued to inspire the development of Mormon theatre companies and productions in various parts of the world furthering the sense of identity that exists within the church itself.

Identity has been shaped through the performances that have stemmed from the trial laden history that is Mormon Church. Identity is defined by experience. "Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" (Hall, 4). The identity that the Mormon Church has established over time has become an ambivalent one because of the fact that performance has so many positive aspects that are in line with the teachings of the church. Performance over time has continued to stray further and further from what the church teaches, and yet the church will stand strong even today that the good can overcome the bad.

PART II:

Going Viral: Spreading Beliefs of Mormons through the Media

"Be in the world, but not of the world" (King James Version, John 17:11, 14–15.) is a declaration that Jesus Christ makes in the bible and has become a common guidepost that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are often reminded of by their leaders in regards to making decisions as far as the media is concerned. The world is often referred to as the environment in which one lives. One of the former leaders of the church, Bruce R. McKonkie defined the world as "the social conditions created by such of the inhabitants of the earth as live carnal, sensuous, lustful lives, and who have not put off the natural man[7] by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." (847). The LDS faith believes that this life is a time to be tested and with that comes challenges to overcome temptation. A large part of overcoming temptation is to become pleasing in the sight of God. This means to follow the commandments that he has given to men through church leadership and revelation. The idea of being in the world and not of the world suggests that members of the church are expected to be aware of what is going on in the world around them. They should be aware of what is popular in the media so as to educate themselves on what the "world" may believe. There is also an expectation that the members should not take part in anything that is not consistent with the teachings of the doctrine of the church. Oftentimes leaders of the church have acknowledged that what is taught and prophesied may not be popular in the world but it is what God expects man to overcome and prove.

This decisive call to action to be "in the world" and "not of [it]" has truly taken effect amongst the church as its members and leadership have become more recognized in the media. It has also taken effect as the leaders have continued to issue warnings about the use

of the media. The Internet and television are two forms of media that are continually

becoming more accessible to the masses.[8] Because of the increased access to the media there

is also a heightened awareness of the effects that the television and the Internet are changing

contemporary culture. This is happening most prevalently with the social networking sites

like Facebook and Twitter that are permitting relationships to evolve from a face-to-face

social interaction to a passive technological interaction that never needs to involve being

anywhere near the same vicinity as a friend. This is just one example of the social

phenomenon with which the Mormon Church is trying to keep up. The church has created its

own form of social networking for the purposes of furthering the work as a church through

the website www.Mormon.org.

The media whether it is what is read, viewed or heard has a great resonance on an

audience and can often determine the audience's perception of what is truth. Lessing, in his

book *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy,* explains the process

of what he refers to as "consumption" (15). He argues that consumption is something that

happens when we are exposed to media and are unaware of the effects that certain media may

have on us. Inherently when media is consumed, it is assumed to be truth. Lessing's idea of

consumption is the reason behind many misconceptions in various social and religious

groups. Such has been the case in the media for the Mormon Church but it a particularly

dynamic group to study with relation to the media because of the focus that the general

church leaders have put on the positive effects of the media along with its potential dangers.

I argue that as Mormon doctrine teaches that members should be "in the world and

not of the world," the practical application of the concept has come to fruition through the

websites that are owned and operated by the church. In keeping with this standard as there is

an increased presence of the LDS faith in the media there is also an increase in the awareness of the LDS faith, and misconceptions persist about the LDS faith. I argue that the church leaders have appealed to the use of the media for the heightened awareness of the doctrines and principles of the church. This has been successful in that there has been an increased awareness and access to the doctrines and principles of the church. There are also, however, increases in the misinterpretations and misconceptions of what compromises the religion.

In order to fortify this argument I address first *what* is the counsel that has come from the leaders of the church concerning the media, *why* the Mormon Church has put so much ambivalent emphasis on the media and *how* that has in turn affected how the general public has consumed what has been offered to them. The Internet and television have become staples in nearly every North American home.[9] Because of the accessibility of both the Internet and the television in the American home, my research will center upon the website www.Mormon.org within the Internet. Up until recent years, the majority of the members of the LDS church resided in the United States. I will focus on the cultural norms that exist in the United States and how this idea has taken affect on the American people as a whole.

What: Guidance Given by LDS Church Leaders about the Media

One of the core principles of the Mormon religion is that of modern revelation through a living prophet. Members of the church believe that there was a time when truth was lost after the apostles were killed. This belief also includes the idea that the power to act in God's name or the priesthood, which was the same authority under which Christ administered ordinances, was lost. A core tenet of Mormon faith is that when the church was restored in 1830 it was under a prophet who was called by God. This prophet, mentioned earlier, was named Joseph Smith. The principle belief of a modern prophet is that he was

called as a mouthpiece of God to re-establish the same church that existed while Jesus Christ was on the earth. The authority to act as a prophet has been passed from person to person through what the church calls an unbroken line of succession. The priesthood that was given to Joseph Smith has been passed down to each prophet to the present day. This authority is given by what is called "the laying on of hands" which is the act of the prophet laying his hands on who is to be the next prophet and blessing him with that same authority and giving him what are referred to as "the keys" to act in God's name.

One of the main purposes of having a prophet on the earth today is to be able to counsel and advise on issues that are relevant to the current time and age in which the prophet presides. This idea leads and guides a lot of the latest declarations that come from the leaders of the church. The prophet also has two counselors that serve under his direction. In modern Christianity, it is believed that in the bible Jesus Christ called apostles such as Peter, James and John that worked with Christ as the prophet in the organizing and maintaining the church.[10] The bible also refers to Christ calling twelve apostles, which is how the Mormon Church organizes itself today. Twice a year members of the church gather to hear from the twelve apostles, the prophet and his counselors. Hence why much of the religion is based around modern revelation that has been delivered during these conferences that are referred to as the "Semi- Annual General Conference(s) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints." These conferences are held at a conference center that has been built in Salt Lake City by the church for this purpose. All members are invited to attend the conference. Members are also encouraged to invite non-members to join them in listening to the leaders of the church and the prophet speak. "There are now over 13 million members in 176 countries and territories. About 6 million of these are in the United States" (Packer, 2) and

only a portion that are able to physically visit the conference center. For those who are unable to attend the conference in Salt Lake City, the information is made available to them through, television, radio, Internet, and later by print. The media is indeed vital to the church for the purpose of relaying these messages to its members. Most of the statements made by the leaders of the church regarding the media originate from these conferences.

In the church the guidance that is given by church leaders is often referred to as "counsel." Counsel is defined as "advice; opinion or instruction given in directing the judgment or conduct of another." To better understand the counsel on the media within the church it is necessary to understand that there is nothing in the faith that prohibits the use of modern technology. Television, movies and the Internet are not condemned and are popular forms of media within the members of the church. There are guidelines that inform members of what types of media are appropriate. Such guidelines come from various manuals within the different organizations within the church. There are sub-groups within the church as an organization. The women 18 and older are a part of a group called "The Relief Society" which was organized as a service organization that provides relief to those in need. Each of the sub organizations meets within said organization on Sundays after having met with the congregation as a whole. The men are in a group called the Priesthood. The group is called Priesthood because of the church believes they hold the power to act in God's name if they are worthy. Each of these organizations within the whole has their own manuals and set of instructions. These documents are comprised of counsel from the scriptures and prophets of the church since the time of Joseph Smith. The youth also has a manual called "For the Strength of Youth" which has an entire section devoted to entertainment and the media. Such guidelines show the emphasis that is placed on the media within the church.

Dialectic, which I have otherwise referred to as ambivalence, meaning the strong connection to two opposing sides, is the word I use to describe the church's stance concerning the media. It is further defined as "the Socratic techniques of exposing false beliefs and eliciting truth"("dialectic", Merriam-Webster's) There are many warnings concerning the negative effects of the media and furthermore equal admonitions to use the media for positive purposes that further one third part of the threefold mission of the church which is to preach the gospel to the world. (Hinckley, 2) A current apostle of the church expresses both warning and praise for the media. He said:

> Most of the sitcoms, dramas, and reality shows contain immorality, violence, and subtle ridicule of traditional values and traditional families. Each year the new shows seem to get worse, pushing the envelope of what the public will accept. What comes out of Hollywood, off the Internet, and in much of today's music creates a web of decadence that can trap our children and endanger all of us…
>
> Because of its sheer size, media today presents vast and sharply contrasting options. Opposite from its harmful and permissive side, media offers much that is positive and productive. Television offers history channels, discovery channels, and education channels. One can still find movies and TV comedies and dramas that entertain and uplift and accurately depict the consequences of right and wrong. The Internet can be a fabulous tool of information and communication, and there is an unlimited supply of good music in the world. Thus our biggest challenge is to choose wisely what we listen to and what we watch. (Ballard, 2003)
>
> In no sense is media condemned, rather it is praised along with the caveat to be wise.

No media should be consumed without bounds of discretion. The warning voices that have come from the church's leaders are without restraint and often based around the doctrine of the church, which helps in the understanding *why* evaluating the types of media we consume and the effects of said consumption.

Why: Evaluation of the Effects of Consumption

The reason behind the emphasis on the media within the LDS church is because of the fact that consumption exists and has adverse effects on the individuals who consume

without discretion and limitation. One of the most important doctrines of the church is that of the family. The entire set of beliefs of the LDS faith is built around the idea that the family is an eternal unit and that having a family is the purpose of life on earth. Inevitably the warnings about the media are directly related to the way the media can destroy the family. President Boyd K. Packer, the president of the twelve apostles, addressed this issue in 2003. He talked about the choices that we make in our lives in regards to the media will resonate with our own behavior and that is why it is so important to make good discretion in choosing what we allow into our homes. He goes on to talk about how the family is what will suffer if wise choices are not exercised because of the fact that "in the virtual reality and the perceived reality of large and small screens, family-destructive viewpoints and behavior are regularly portrayed as pleasurable, as stylish, as exciting, and as normal." (p 5) Packer does not, however lead his whole discussion based on the wiles of the media but instead turns to a call to action as he addresses the members of the church and says that "the time has come when members of the Church need to speak out and join with the many other concerned people in opposition to the offensive, destructive, and mean-spirited media influence that is sweeping over the earth." Packer's counsel is something that has been put into action by members of the church through the use of editing devices, abstaining from watching certain television programs and even speaking out in dire circumstances. The prophet of the church has also expressed a lot of concern in the ways that the church members are allowing the media to inhibit their spiritual progression. The current living prophet Thomas S. Monson has enlightened the members of the church with the facts that "our children today are being educated by the media, including the Internet. In the United States, reports have observed, "the average child watches approximately four hours of television daily, much of the

programming being filled with violence, alcohol and drug use, and sexual content."("An Overview of Home Internet Access in the US.") This kind of excess leads to the replication of the things they are constantly seeing at home on the television. The children consume and in turn the consumption leads to the influence how one acts and reacts in their lives. This becomes particularly relevant as the family pertains to most of the key ideologies within the religion. And "if there is one universally recognized function of the family it is 'consumption.'" (Delphi, 271) Because the family is one of the core principles of the church, the leaders have been quick to point out what should be done when the media confronts its members with ideas that are not in accordance with the teachings of the church. Because the media is increasing in popularity and in accessibility, it is important that the church informs its members on how to approach the media.

The leaders of the church have warned the members of the harmful effects of the media. The living prophet, Thomas S. Monson, recently (2010) observed in a research study that the media is teaching teens that it is normal and natural to engage in sexual behavior. Thomas S. Monson, president of the church stated "The Lord cuts through all the media messages with clear and precise language when He declares to us, 'Be ye clean.'"("Preparation Brings Blessings") There are, however, guidelines on how to properly view the media. These guidelines are often taught to the members of the church through the "General Conferences" where leaders of the church speak. There are also a set standard of lesson manuals from which each Sunday lesson is taught in every organized congregation of the Church worldwide. The Sunday lessons include teachings from the scriptures,[11] the church's leaders, and past General Conferences of the church worldwide. The guidelines recommend that those consuming the media should not view, read or listen to anything that

goes against the essential principles of the church. In one of the manuals of the church called *True to the Faith* there are topics relating to the doctrine of the church organized alphabetically. One of the topics is "Media." In the Media section, M. Russell Ballard, an apostle of the Church is quoted as saying "The choices we make in media can be symbolic of the choices we make in life. Choosing the trendy, the titillating, the tawdry in the TV programs or movies we watch can cause us to end up, if we're not careful, choosing the same things in the lives we live." Ballard agrees that consumption exists and that it there are certain behaviors members of the church should not want to emulate and thus they should not choose to consume media that does not have a positive purpose in teaching something.

The church teaches that there is a place for the media and that it should not be eliminated. The warnings of being selective in what media members choose to consume is only a precursor to the positive benefits that can come from the media. Brigham Young, the second prophet of the church, often encouraged participation in the arts as it had "potential in communicating religious principles." (Stout, 89) In more contemporary revelation, the invitation still stands to invite all good things to be a part of our lives. The church has found many uses of the Internet to further its mission to find ancestor's names record them and perform religious ordinances in their behalf at the Temple:

> New technology makes it easier than ever to fulfill that responsibility. Temple and
> family history work is now facilitated by a system known as the "new FamilySearch."
> [8] This Internet-based system helps members identify their ancestors, determine what
> ordinance work needs to be done for them, and prepare their names for the temple. It
> can be accessed from home, a family history center, [9] or wherever the Internet is
> available. The steps are easy to follow. (Nelson, 2010)

The church outlines what are to be considered as worthy types of media. He offers a set of guidelines what is to be considered worthwhile. The emphasis is not put on what to avoid, but rather what can bring about positive consequences. In the same respects the church invites members to seek out media that teaches and instructs. Many of the leaders have displayed, that there is a clear *ambivalence* in determining the effects of the media. Though Brigham Young (1801-1877) as leader of the church faced different challenges than the living prophet today the advice is the same to members of the church. It is imperative to seek out entertainment that is uplifting and teaches to live a life centered on love and service, as these are core to the Mormon faith.[12] By doing this it will inherently teach the members to do good and not to accept that what the "world" is teaching is what God expects of them.

With the many advances in technology there are ways that the Church leadership is using the Internet to inform those of the beliefs of the church and to extend invitation to those who are not members of the church as a way of strengthening the Church's missionary efforts. There are also many forms of media that have been produced for the purpose of furthering missionary efforts.[13] In the earlier mentioned Sunday Manuals of the church, which are distributed to each auxiliary worldwide, there is a lesson entitled "The Powerful Influence of the Media." This lesson recommends that advise children how to interpret potentially harmful media, imagery and messages. Members are encouraged to "turn away[14]" from things on television not in keeping with the Church's teachings, and are told to teach their children to do the same. (195)

Members of the church are also following the counsel of the Prophet Joseph Smith that "if there is anything lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." ("Articles of Faith" 1) Many Mormon companies in production have risen out of this

admonition in attempts to give members of the church easier access to entertainment in the

media that is used for the purpose of "uplift[ing] you" ("For the Strength of Youth,"13.) One

production company named "Halestorm Productions" has based its entire structure around

the creation of movies made for Mormons and about Mormons. This company creates

entertainment that is in keeping with the teachings with the church as its goal is create

entertainment that can be positive and uplifting. The films would never include any material

that could be considered explicit in any way shape or form. This company could be

considered "in the world" of entertainment, but not "of the world of entertainment." Beyond

the independent film endeavors that have been inspired by and followed through be members

of the church, there have been the endeavors that the church itself has embarked upon. Many

of the endeavors have included public relations and various advertisements. Among other

publications have been films that have contextualized the faith or the history of the religion

itself.

> As the most lauded public service campaign in history, the series solidified the LDS church's reputation as family-centered, while revealing the power of film to present a Mormon message effectively and non-threateningly to a mass audience. Incorporating higher production values in films like *Legacy* (1990), a tribute to the Mormon pioneers; *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd* (2000), a fictionalized treatment of Book of Mormon themes and culture; and *Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration* (2005), the church seems ready to invite public scrutiny through a medium with which it is clearly comfortable and proficient." (Givens, 272)
> The media has long been a popular vehicle to inform the masses within the church,

and as Givens mentions in his book *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture,* the

church has long been acquainted with the benefits the media can have in the use of spreading

and sharing the gospel.

It is important for members of the Mormon faith to closely follow the counsel that the

prophet's give them because the prophets are considered by faithful members of the church

to be the "mouthpieces of the Lord" (*Preach my gospel*, 45) and are those who act in God's name. The members of the church show their faith in God and in their religion that there is a prophet of God on the earth today by living by the counsel they have been given. The religion could not stand if its members did not support what the living prophet advises. The religion also would not be able to sustain itself if it did not attempt to keep of with the ever-increasing changes in contemporary culture and technology.

The Bible was a series of documents written by prophets 3000 years ago. Though the bible is still a major part of the LDS faith the statutes of the faith are built on the principle that "surely [God] will do nothing but he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The primary role and responsibility of the leaders of the church today is to guide and advise on issues that are relevant to contemporary living. This is why it is so important that the followers are faithful to the things that the modern prophets and apostles exhort.

Cyberspace and Religion

Mormon.org is a website that is owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. The website is not designed for members of the church itself, but rather a place where those "investigating[15]" the church can turn to for answers to their questions about the things they believe about Mormons. Up until the summer of 2010 the Mormon.org website was designed to answer the questions that one who was not of the faith might have had. There were categories that outlined the different doctrines of belief. The purpose of the website was entirely for those not of the faith to learn new concepts about the faith. There was a page of "Frequently Asked Questions." There was an option to chat with representatives of the church and ask them any other questions that one might have had. Not only has the interface of the whole website changed, but so has its purpose. The main

categories that the websites lists are: "Our People, Our Value, Our Faith, Visit Us and FAQ". The focus has changed from educating those who visit the site on the belief of the religion, but to educating on the culture of the Mormons as a people. The organization of the church requires a lot from the members of its congregation, striving to give each person and assignment or calling that requires them to lead, teach or serve in some capacity. Because one must be highly involved in the organization outside of Sunday Meetings to be considered an active member of the church, there is an inherent culture that has so much to do with the people as a whole. Understanding the culture aids in the understanding of the faith and vice versa. This is a great example of the reason why the website has changed.

The new website highlights personal accounts in video form that are posted displaying various real life stories of Mormons who tell about their life and why their religion is so important to them. The videos vary from person to person. There are different races, family situations, socio economic statuses, but there is one thing in common among them all and that is they each dispel something about the general belief of what Mormons are. Because the church is known for its conservative values, its middle class Americans, and its large Caucasian population, there are many generalizations about the members that the church is trying to dismiss. Some of the examples that the website highlights are working mothers, prominent political activists, like democratic senator Harry Reid for the state of Nevada, urban African American teenagers, poor Mexican immigrant families are all some of the stories that are highlighted. In reference to the general public's reaction on the launching of the new website Ron Wilson, the manager of Internet and marketing for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints said "The response was incredible…We read story after story of how this Church has impacted these people's lives. While every story was different,

there was a commonality of a life impacted by striving to follow Jesus Christ."[16] The

Internet has become a very useful tool to the church as a whole as the productions of such

websites as Mormon.org has attempted to give notice to what is truthful.

Though the Internet has only been in existence in the last fifty years and has only

been in the commercial field in the last twenty it is one of the most powerful forms of media.

The Internet has a vast capability to reach across continents. The Internet is becoming more

and more a prominent component of our culture as the number of people who have phones

with the Internet grows. It is a great tool for the spreading of truth and seems to be an even

greater tool for the spreading of falsehood. In this section of the thesis I focus on three

reasons why the church has chosen to put so much recent emphasis on the revamping of all

of the websites that operate under it. The first reason for the emphasis is to use the Internet as

a missionary tool, and to educate the masses on what is true about the Mormon religion. The

second reason the church uses the Internet is because it is a great tool in strengthening the

faith of the members of the church, and has done this in through various means. The third

reason is for continuity in the church worldwide as it grows in numbers. I argue that these

three reasons have acted as catalysts in the development of the website Mormon.org and

technology advances such as iPod aps, networking sites, and YouTube videos.

"Every Member a Missionary"

One of the former prophets of the church, David O. McKay coined the phrase within

the church "every member a missionary."(122) The emphasis of missionary work has been a

strong one in the church's history as it has grown. The membership of the church has grown

from the one member in 1830 to over 13 million members in 2007 in over 176 countries in

the world. (Ballard) There is no doubt that missionary work is important. This belief comes

from a scripture in the Bible in the book of Matthew that commands men to "go ye therefore and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (28:19) This principle was further emphasized in the church's early days when the first prophet taught members that missionary work was a way of sharing a great blessing and that it would bring "great joy" into the member's life as they shared what they believed. [17] It also has been emphasized that one can strengthen their own personal spiritual conviction when they share messages they believe (*True to the Faith,* 104–6). Because there is a great desire to share the belief of the gospel, the church has created a relevant application that allows members and full time missionaries to invite by means of the internet.

It is certain that missionary work is one of the main purposes of the church, but why is it that the Internet has become so useful? Furthermore, what is the reasoning behind the purpose of Mormon.org? Has the website's recent release caused the church membership to increase? I argue that the website is indeed a great tool for missionary work, but it is just that, a tool. It is not the reason for any increase in church membership, rather, the website serves a greater purpose in helping educate "consumers" on what is and is not true. Indeed there have been converts to the church through the use of the website Mormon.org who have had no other relation with the church whatsoever, but the percentage is too miniscule at this point to prove that the website is affecting the membership growth worldwide.

Within the media there have been many different representations of Mormonism that vary and can be from purely doctrinal to completely false. The Internet because of its ability to research at the click of a button has become of particular use to the church in trying to dispel falsehoods. Some of the misconceptions come from the fact that the church has had

many members in the cultural and political limelight who are mistaken as official

representatives of the church. In an article printed by the church it was mentioned:

> By virtue of their membership in the Church, well-known and influential Mormons
>
> such as former governor Mitt Romney, author Stephanie Meyer, Senator Harry Reid
>
> and TV personality Glenn Beck represent the diversity of Mormon culture and
>
> demonstrate the broad range of personalities within it. However, the causes they
>
> advance are political or cultural, and certainly not Church-specific. They would be the
>
> first to affirm they have no intention of speaking officially for the Church, especially
>
> regarding matters of doctrine or policy. While some people may think these
>
> personalities represent the thinking of their faith, they simply do not, and don't
>
> pretend to.("The Diverse Voices of Mormonism" III, par.3)

The church has had to dispel the misconceived notions of those who have been

uninformed. One of the great solutions to the problem has been the new website

Mormon.org. In the past the amount of negative websites towards the Mormon belief were

highly accessible and were vast in number. Those websites still exist, but because of the push

and emphasis that the church has put on Mormon.org it is the first website that pops up when

the word "Mormon" is put into Google, Yahoo, or Bing search engines. An obvious reason

for this would be the fact that the LDS church is one of the most lucrative churches in the

world and has been able to ensure, through monetary means, that their website is the first to

show up.[18] The advertisements for the website are found in various places on the Internet,

but particularly on social networking sites like Facebook. The website seeks to inform the

misinformed. In the process of informing it, also seeks to invite. The Associated Press

observed the fact that there is major "scrutiny that Mormons are subjected to," and that is

why it is so vital to take action in teaching. The major reason for the scrutiny is "because of a general lack of understanding about what [the Mormons] believe." (2010)

Some of the ways this website reaches out to achieve its purpose in the missionary effort is by relating to various groups of people. Upon entrance of the website there is the option to "Meet Mormons: Discover Mormons who share your personal experience." Then there is the drop down option to select gender, age, ethnicity, country and even previous religion. A large component of a religion is the community it creates. The website is seeking to create a community that has a beckon call for everyone, and I argue that it does so effectively. Regardless the ethnicity, age and background a myriad of profiles pops up when searching for "Mormons like you." One may click on the picture of someone they think looks interesting and then read a profile listing who this person is, what their interests are and why they belong to the church that they do. As stated in the Church's official release form the purpose of the website is "for the public to see and review to get a better sense of the community of people that make up members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (par. 1)

One particular profile that pops up when male, under 25, and African American is listed is a young man named Paris. He tells of his life as a homeless teen and how the missionaries came to teach him about the church. He walks the viewer through a series of pivotal events that led him to where he is today: a college student, studying business, and looking for girls to date. His story is certainly unique to the predominantly Caucasian middle class congregation that makes up the church. His story is inspiring and moving, as it is one of success and overcoming horrible odds. The profiles are only one aspect of the website that is used for the purpose of inviting others to learn more about the church. There are several

videos posted on the website of members from all walks of life, and in all sorts of circumstances. The videos serve the purpose of showing people with whom the general public can relate. The videos are not an interview talking all about why one should join the church, but rather, they serve the purpose of exploring the every day lives of someone who happens to be a member of the Mormon church and how that affects the mundane choices each person must make each day. The videos always end with "I am" statements describing the essentials of the person in the video and the last line is the phrase "…and I am a Mormon."

Beyond the "I am a Mormon" campaign there are many other tools on the website that allow those not-of –the-faith to explore. One of the main menu options is "Our Values." It lists some of the core practices in the church without jumping too far into the core doctrines. Some examples of the sub categories within the option are "Strengthening Families, Missionary Work, Humanitarian Aid, and Service to Others." There is no beating around the bush that Mormons strive to be missionaries and as it is stated on the website "The blessings of the gospel are so precious, that we try to share them with everyone we can." This statement justifies the purpose of the site and does so in a non-abrasive manner leaving those who investigate the church with the understanding that the message that is shared is because of the joy and happiness it gives its followers. The explanation for the missionary effort appeals to the ethos of its visitors.

The efficacy of the new Mormon.org website is also evident in the way it has been linked to popular websites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and BlogSpot. The Mormon channel on YouTube has indeed gone viral as there have been well over a million hits in the first 6 months of its existence.[19] This also allows for the spreading of information to be more

comprehensive. Advertising is just another form of action that the church has taken to drive the understanding of its beliefs to a greater level. Many of the advertisements for the new Mormon.org website show up on toolbars and blog rolls of the mentioned websites. This website has indeed served its purpose in opening the eyes of understanding and working as a missionary tool. There are however so many resources within this website and other church websites that serve the purpose of strengthening the members.

Faith Found on the Internet

As has been explored in detail, the leaders of the church understand that the Internet can be used as a tool for good. As leaders of the church one of their major responsibilities is to help strengthen and fortify the members through giving them opportunities to better understand their own testimony and faith. Initiatives have been taken to ensure that the Internet is available to good purposes for the members of the church. Some of those initiatives involve Mormon messages, creating profiles on the Mormon.org website, and managing church assignments through tools such as the LDS.org website.

Mormon messages are inspiring stories, thoughts or quotes from church leaders and members that are posted each week on the LDS.org[20] website, and through YouTube. The messages are often based on one of the principles of the gospel that are core beliefs of the members of the church. The videos are a few minutes long and provide a spiritual insight to a particular concept. They are not a long discourse on some deep confusing doctrine. The length and accessibility of the videos is an example of why they act as a great tool of strengthening faith. The length, for one allows for anyone with any type of schedule to be able to enjoy a small thought that may change ones thoughts and behavior for the time being. The fact that the videos are placed on the internet and on large websites like YouTube makes

them easy to find and accessible to anyone who has access to the Internet be it on a phone, or

a computer. These are faith promoting tools and a simple way that the head of the Church is

using the Internet to help grow the faith of its current members.

Some other ways the church currently uses the Internet to help increase the members

faith is through the creation of profiles on the Mormon.org website. As was explored,

missionary work is emphasized in the church because it is something members are taught is a

commandment. By sharing the things a member believes, they are also instructed that their

own faith will grow. In a recent general conference of the church one of the current apostles

of the church, Russell M. Nelson spoke about how members can be good missionaries. One

of the main points of his address was to encourage members to create profiles on the

Mormon.org website. He shared a story of a young man who visited the website out of

curiosity and was quickly baptized a member of the church. Each member of the church has

the capability of logging into any of the church websites with their church membership

record number.[21] As a member of the church one may submit a profile to the Mormon.org

website for further review to be posted as one of the members that answers a non member's

question, or dispels some of the misconceptions about the church. Some of the questions that

are asked on the Profile applications are things like "Does the Mormon Church endorse

political parties?" "Why don't Mormons have paid clergy?" and "Do Mormons practice

Polygamy?" Once a member has answered the questions the profile is then processed for

further review and is sometimes edited to reflect the accurate teachings of the church. By

being a missionary the member's faith is strengthened. This gives members the opportunity

to share their beliefs in a way that is less intimidating than in a face-to-face contact, and yet

they are still able to strengthen their own belief through the act of being a representative of the church.

The third way the members' faith is strengthened is through the use of another website designed just for the members of the church. The website is called LDS.org. LDS.org helps members to manage their church assignments. The organization of the church is based around the fact that all the members of the congregation are a part of the leadership. There is no paid clergy; instead the leadership is called to serve. This is a process that Mormons believe is administered through revelation from God. Because the organization of the church is so large and there is a need for continuity the LDS.org website allows members access to all of the resources needed to serve in any position. I argue that the faith of the members is strengthened in the service of others as they are acting after a Christian manner and selflessly giving of their time, talents and efforts, but that service is only enhanced by the practices of the Internet.

The LDS.org website provides access to all of the various manuals that are used to teach Sunday lessons and be trained on how to serve in a particular area. There is also a membership directory that allows members access to one another's contact information. This type of at your fingertips information is now even more accessible as the church has also created several aps for iPods that incorporate the information. All of the said information can be found via hardcopy but now it is more accessible. The accessibility makes it easier for a member to serve because they have all the resources they need and whenever they need them, this in turn allows for more opportunities to serve, which in turn strengthens their faith.

Facing Immensity with Continuity

As the membership of the church grows there is a greater emphasis on keeping things the same in the church no matter where it is established. The Internet serves this purpose as well. A belief central to the faith is that it is the church of Jesus Christ who in the bible and other books of scripture is described as "the same yesterday, today and forever." (D&C 20: 12) Likewise the church believes that the organization of the church should be the same all across the world down to the lessons that are taught in Sunday school classes.

The continuity is important to maintain stewardship over each of the church branches and members. Because the Internet is not bound by country it makes for an easy form of communication. The Church publishes new manuals each year to be taught in various classes. The Internet now makes those manuals accessible to members all over the world. Even as the church grows in smaller countries in Africa and Asia, it is finding a way to provide the Internet in the meetinghouses that allows for the continuity across the world.

After careful observation of how the church has benefited from the use of the Internet, the church has acted upon the positive aspects and created Mormon.org for the benefit of both members and non-members alike. This website will only be the beginning of many more technological advances to come in the church. As the church becomes savvier it will continue to keep up with the times and conform to the newest trends. This conforming allows the church to highlight the good in the world of technology and use it to benefit its members and investigators. Because of the nature of the church there will always be a need for face to face human interaction, but as far as other technological advances, the church will not be left behind because it is now experiencing the benefits of technology in full force.

PART III:

Media within the Mormon Religion vs. Media in Other Christian Sects

In evaluating the effects of the media within the modern Christian world, the first understanding that must be established is that of the use of the media. Each religion uses the media in a slightly different way. While some religions condemn the use of the media, many are finding it to be a progressive and effective form of spreading belief. The LDS religion is no different in this vein, but rather is different in the approach that there is a necessity to promote good media and provide more media that is considered accessible and worthy.

The use of media in religion is no new idea. Throughout the history of the Christian world, the media has had its influence. With the creation of the radio, there has been the use of broadcasting sermons and discourses to the masses. Televangelists got an early start on the radio. With the development of the television there are commercials, advertisements and full stations dedicated to religion and the preaching of what might be considered a particular faiths gospel.

Since the beginning of Christianity there have been missionaries, called to preach the gospel. Paul, in the bible, preached to the Romans about a Savior who had come to redeem men from their sins. This idea of missionary work has carried on from century to century. As various sects of Christianity have broken off, and found their own differences, there has been a call to increase membership of the church. All manner of communication has been the vehicle of spreading belief. Starting with the Protestant reformation and Martin Luther's 95 theses that were posted to the door of the castle chapel in Wittenburg, Germany, where Luther was a university professor, the opinion of religion has been spread in the epochal manner of the current time period. Stout mentions in his book <u>Encyclopedia of Religion,</u>

Communication and the media that "with the advent of radio and television, religious audiences have expanded both in number and in complexity. In the current information society, the internet, the television, and satellite communication, have created opportunities as well as challenges for religious communities." (26) As the media has become a more prevalent resource for obtaining information, it has become increasingly more obvious that various religions have conformed to the evolution of the media. Stout mentions "the Nazarenes who once abstained from going to the movies, but now use a wider range of the use a wider range of media" (26) Christian religions have often advised members on the matter of media. The Catholic religion has been one of particular evolution in this respect. The religion in particular 50 years ago counseled its members on the use of the media has, as of the nineties, turned to the idea that personal judgment is more appropriate. (26) This is particularly interesting, because while the religion encourages personal judgment, there is still a large effort put forth to use the media for the spreading of belief, be it through radio stations, television programs and stations themselves. When approaching the idea of media in religion it is appropriate to understand that there has been a clear evolution of the definition of the media and its role. For instance, the first time the bible was printed by a printing press for the masses, could be considered a form of media at the time and was rather revolutionary in the Christian religion as it made the consumer much more autonomous. For the intents and purposes of which I will address the use of the media, I will be referring to the use of the media (internet, movie, television, radio, and music) since the twentieth century.

The media has been highly used in the religious world because it is an effective way to make a call to action to the masses. Kintz, in the book *Media, Culture and the Religious Right* argues that the 1920s was the most prevalent outbreak of the use of media in the

religion because of the public policies that were coming forward. Her argument is that the use of the media is often in attempt to change a public policy in order to be more in accordance with the particular Christian belief. (7).

There is no doubt that the use of the media has become a popular tool within each Christian sect. It is becoming increasingly popular, as technology has made the media global and far reaching. With the introduction of the Internet, there has been even more use of the spread of belief. As was explored in Part II of this essay, the LDS faith has found a great use for the spreading of belief through the use of the Internet. This idea however is not single to the LDS faith alone. There are many other Christian faiths that are using the media for various reasons. In this section of the thesis I will explore and answer the questions: How is the media being used in other Christian religions and how is this different from the LDS faith? Does the force of media pull other religions ambivalently? Why is the media being used so broadly in Christian religions? What are the current implications of the use of the media within religions and what does it suggest will happen in the future with the use of the media? As I explore the topics further I will best argue what the use of the media in current Christian religion is saying about American culture and humanity. This study and research is to further the understanding of the co role that media and religion play in the shaping of who we are as a modern day society.

The Use of the Media in the LDS Faith Versus Other Religions

I have had few experiences where I have sat on the "investigator" side of the spectrum. Of these experiences I have had many insights on the difference between the Mormon faith and other religions, particularly other Christian religions. One of these

experiences left me with specific questions about the way each religion approaches

proselyting and how media is utilized in the process.

A student invited me to attend a theatrical performance that she was a part of. I

bought a ticket to what was entitled "A Night on the Red Carpet." I noticed that the ticket

stub noted that it was part of a Christian Performing group that was putting this on at their

church. I had been to many performances like this in the past and this was expected to be

nothing new. I was somewhat taken by surprise to see some innovation with the use of the

media that I had not seen before. The performance was a series of skits interlaced with pop

music, pop culture references, and religious references. Every two or three skits there was

what was called a "human video" that took the bodies of the performers and created shapes

and movement to music that was either lip synced or just played in the background. The

music was usually Christian rock and told a story. The one that stands out in my mind was

about the story of Jesus Christ. The dancers moved through the stories of his life. They acted

out the suffering that Christ went through and at the very end they created a cross out of

bodies. The young man playing Jesus Christ climbed on top of the bodies and stretched out

his arms as if to be hung on the cross.

After the performance was over the minister got up to talk about the youth who were

a part of this program and why they were trying to save money. He mentioned that there

would be donation jars outside the lobby entrance where patrons could give more money

towards the building of this youth program. There was also a mention of pamphlets about

the church. The proselytizing that took place because of that performance was driven by

money. Most proselytizing within Christian religions takes place with the purpose of earning

more members for a congregation, but with more members comes more money making the

bigger motivation for the use of the media money. I argue that this experience made it clear

that there is a fundamental difference between the Mormon religion and other Christian

religions with the use of media. This difference comes from the motivation behind the

proselytizing.

The Mormon Church approaches the aspect of the media ambivalently. The leaders

of the church have offered multiple warnings about the damaging effects of the media. A

general leader of the church Larry Lawrence offered advice to parents during an address to

the church in October of 2010. He said "If either [parent] feels uncomfortable about a movie,

a television show, a video game…. or an Internet activity, have the courage to support each

other and say no." (par.12) These types of warnings are frequent reminders to avoid what is

not in keeping with what the church teaches. The warnings however are accompanied by the

recognizable benefits that the media offers members of the church. The prophet and current

president of the church Thomas S. Monson stated in an address in April 2011 "Our young

single adults have volunteered their time to locate missing members using the Internet, social

media, and other modern means of communication." (Par. 6) The blessings of the media are

always accompanied by warnings. This ambivalent stance is more prevalent in the Mormon

Church than in other Christian religions. The "Night on the Red Carpet" tried to blend pop

culture and media with religion instead of being ambivalent about the good and the bad. This

ambivalence is the major distinction between the LDS Church and other Christian religions.

While the use of the media in various Christian religions is similar in the sense that it

is an effective way to increase the membership of a congregation, the incentive of increased

membership is different in each particular Christian world. Mormon clergy members are not

paid for their service. [22] Full time missionaries are not paid for their work. On the contrary,

they pay to fund themselves for their two-year mission. The membership is based on a physical location and boundary, therefore, one congregation that is larger than another would not earn more money or have a clergyman that makes more than another. The belief is that the members will share their belief out of common concern for mankind. The motivation is that because they love and care about their neighbor, then they will make it a point to share with their neighbor what it is that makes them most happy- their faith.

Why media in the Christian World?

There is no one justifiable explanation as to why the media is used so rampantly in the Christian world, but I argue that there are many reasons for it. While the use of the media is not singular to the Christian world, there are reasons that many are drawn to it. One of the peculiarities among the Christian world is that most members of the Christian faith can be considered one hundred percent faithful and still own a television or a computer. There is no doctrinal pursuit against the use of these modern technologies. Out of convenience in reaching the members of a large group, and faith, the media has the most positive capability of doing that.

Another one of the main reasons that I argue the use of the media in the Christian religion is for survival. Religion is becoming more and more obsolete. Christianity as a faith is becoming more of a tradition than a religion. In order to survive for years to come there is a need to appeal to the youth. There is no doubt that the youth today are drawn to the media. Going back to my experience at the "Night on the Red Carpet," the cultural and social references were catered to a young audience. Though most of the crowd was of middle age, considering a large portion of the tickets were sold to parents of the performance, there was no lack of reference to a much younger crowd. Some of the jokes derived from Kanye

West's 2009 rant at MTV's Video Music Awards.[23] Other jokes had reference to pop culture such as Justin Bieber's popularity amongst young teenage girls and "yo mamma" jokes. All of these references were intertwined with various biblical references, and other religious anecdotes. The purpose was to appeal to a younger crowd and thus give life to the church in a younger generation. There was no regret in tying in the modern cultural references, and in fact was what seemed to be the goal, rather than to create new performance that was more in line with the teachings of the church.

Another reason that Media is so widely spread in Christian religion is due to the easy access to debate. Christianity has long been combative and forthright in their opinions regarding all things religion. Because there are so many sects of Christianity, each sect is at odds in arguing which is right (Smith, 13) The Internet is an easy way to argue discreetly by way of open forums, discussion boards and chat rooms. Users enter under the guise of an alias or screen name, with no need to reveal their true identity. This allows them to say what ever is on their mind without the worry of whether or not it may seem demeaning or offensive. The Internet has provided a whole new place where debate can happen.

There are many reasons why Christians use the media but I argue that the main appeal of the media comes from the convenience of appealing to the masses, it is an easy way to reach the younger generations, and it allows for uninhibited, open discussion. Beyond these reasons, there are many others, but these are a few that are unique to Christianity itself.

Conclusion: Our Society Now and Later

As there is a growing popularity in the world of the media, the religions that choose to use the media are seeing a positive outcome. There has been growth in conversion, there has been convenience in communication and there has been a greater understanding of the faith through the varied resources. As our society advances technologically there is a much greater need for religion to keep up or otherwise diminish. Communication has changed significantly over the past 20 years and will continue to change at an exponential rate as new devices and technology is introduced.

Face-to-face contact has become less and less of a necessity in contemporary society as the introduction of text messaging, Skype, instant messaging, email and other forms of technological communication have come to the forefront. As our society turns to a less of a face-to-face approach, so will our religion. The only way for religion to survive is to utilize the same resources that have become common in society today.

There will be a decrease, of sorts, amongst those who now consider themselves to be faithful. Because there is an increase in the trust of man, there will be a decrease in the trust of a higher power. With all the advances in technology many will turn to believe that man is all-powerful and can create without the help of a God. This will lead to a shift in what we now know as common in the world of religion. The fellowship of faith followers will decrease significantly as there the need for tangible proof and evidence of all things becomes more of a priority. This is inevitable as it is the beginning signs have already started to take place in society today.

Karl Marx raised a significant question when discussing the effects of technology on a society. He asked, "is it our society that determines the direction of our technology, or is it

our technology that determines the direction of our society?" (George, 5.) The society in which we live now seeks for convenience and instant gratification. There is an innate sense of entitlement that has become the common mentality as the majority has continually pushed this ideal that self-interest is normal, natural and should not be suppressed. The relationship between technology and society is co- dependant. Our society has determined the general direction of technology, but as technology has taken that route, the route of technology has in turn, determined society's direction and will only continue down the same pathway as time moves forward.

Performance in theory takes place in so many aspects of life. Within the LDS culture there are deep seeds of performance. The culture has been influenced historically and continues to be influenced in contemporary culture. However, as times are changing the form of influence changes as well. There has been a shift from dance and theatre to what is now most common in performance – the media. The LDS church has utilized the media in many ways as not only a form of performance, but a vehicle of building faith, seeking out converts and communicating with the members of the worldwide church. This use of the media is not however unique to the LDS religion alone, and has become popular in many Christian faiths. What is unique to the Mormon Church is how it views the media: as a great tool and a potential danger. The fact that so many religions are using the media is significant to society's rapid rate of change and dependence on technology and other media. And so it is, that as society is in a constant state of change and adaptation, so religion must be in order to survive.

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Endnotes

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[1] The LDS faith is not only the fourth largest Christian but also one of the fastest growing Christian denominations in the world, completing "a chapel every working day" See Ballard, M. Russell "Faith, Family, Facts, and Fruits," *Ensign*, Nov 2007, 25–27

[2] See Smith, Joseph, "Joseph Smith-History", Vol. 1, Chapters 1-5

[3] See *Hill Cumorah Pageant.* 2008, http://www.hillcumorah.org

[4] See Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, www.religioustolerance.org

[5] It was a social center that provided relief and solace for the weary saint. See Sowell, Deborah Hickenlooper, Theatrical Dancing in the Territory of Utah, 1848-1868, Dance Chronicle, Vol. 1, No.2 (1977-1978), pp. 96-126.

[6] The meetinghouse that was constructed was for the purpose of Sunday meeting. During the week it was, however, used for the purpose of entertainment, See Sowell, Deborah Hickenlooper, Theatrical Dancing in the Territory of Utah, 1848-1868, Dance Chronicle, Vol. 1, No.2 (1977-1978), pp. 96-126.

[7] A scripture found in the *Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ*: Mosiah 3:19- "The natural man is an enemy to God unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit"

[8] Sixty-two million U.S. households, or 55 percent of American homes, had a Web-connected computer in 2003, according to just-released U.S. Census data

[9] "Overall, 80.6% of homes in Nielsen's National People Meter panel have a computer (either desktop or laptop) in their homes as of mid-November, 2008. Over the past year that number has inched upward slightly, from 77.9% a year ago. And nine of ten homes with home computers (91.6%) have some sort of internet connection: 73.9% of all U.S. panel homes have some sort of internet access. That figure is up three full points from November, 2007." An Overview of Home Internet Access in the U.S. December, 2008

[10] In the Bible Jesus Christ organized his church. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11).

[11] The Church refers to the various set of scriptures as "The Standard Works." Members of the Church believe in and read The Holy Bible, but they also have other sets of scripture like *The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, which is an account of the resurrected Jesus Christ coming to visit the ancient Indians in America. This was a book that the members of the faith believe was translated by the prophet Joseph Smith through the power of the Priesthood.

[12] "During His ministry on the earth, Jesus Christ spent His time serving and helping others. True disciples of Jesus Christ do likewise. The Savior said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35)."

[13] There is a book entitled *Preach My Gospel* that acts as a manual for all full time missionaries to learn the lessons that they should teach investigators. This manual also includes advice on how to conduct yourself as a missionary. Along with this manual there are various videos that can be used to enhance the lessons in the manual and further invite investigators to come to understand the teachings of the faith.

[14] The term "turn away" comes from the scripture in the bible that talks about the evils that would exist in the last days on earth and how if one is to be on God's side then "From such turn away." (2 Tim. 3:1–5.)

[15] The term 'investigator' is what missionaries of the Church have called those who are actively participating in lessons taught by the missionaries and showing interest in the church's doctrine with the possible desire to convert.

[16] Paulson, Michael was the author of the article *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television.* He conducted the interview and quoted Ron Wilson

[17] The Doctrine and Covenants is a book of scripture in the Mormon religion otherwise known as the D & C. It is one of the four compilations (in addition to the Bible and Book of Mormon) that the members study and reference. It will be cited as D&C hereafter. This particular scripture to which I reference refers to D&C 18:15-16

[18] Time Magazine August 4, 1997. This article studies how the organization of the church, including the welfare program, has been built to make it one of the more lucrative American religions in contemporary culture.

[19] www.youtube.com/mormonmessages

[20] LDS.org is another website owned and operated by the church. Its purpose is to be used as a resource for members of the church as it has all of the Sunday lesson manuals, member directories, calendars and recent General Conference addresses.

[21] When a member of the Church is baptized, they are assigned a record number so that they are accounted for in the records of the church.

[22] Mormon.org states, "Since Jesus Christ stressed the importance of selfless service, it's fitting that the Church of Jesus Christ is run by volunteers."

[23] West, a popular rap artist was outraged that Taylor Swift, a new country artist, received best artist of the year over his friend Beyonce and quickly jumped on stage, stole the microphone, and continued to talk about why Swift did not deserve to earn the award.