

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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remains, partly because of the Church's claim of unique legitimacy.

"Churches" and "denominations" in sociological terminology differ from sects in that both of the former are organizationally complex and have positive relationships with society. Denominations accept the legitimacy claims of other religious groups, while churches do not (Roberts, pp. 181–202). There are several problems in classifying The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints according to this typology. Its claim to unique legitimacy makes it something other than a denomination, while its lack of societal dominance makes it something other than a church (except in Utah and certain other locations).

To explain unclear cases like this, sociologists developed an additional classification—the "established sect" (Yinger, pp. 266–73). An established sect is organizationally complex while retaining moderate tension with society and the claim to unique legitimacy. While the LDS Church meets these criteria, social scientists increasingly argue that it deviates sufficiently from conventional religious traditions to warrant even further classification outside of the church-denomination-sect typology. They argue that the term "new religion" is perhaps the most accurate and that modern-day Mormonism is on the verge of becoming a major new world religion (Stark, pp. 11–12).

[See also Cult.]

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LAWRENCE A. YOUNG

SEED OF ABRAHAM

The "seed of Abraham" are those who, through righteousness, inherit the blessings promised Abraham through the covenant he made with the Lord and who themselves are a promised blessing to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–5; 13:16; 17; Abr. 2:6–11). The phrase also has messianic overtones: Abraham saw the days of the Messiah and rejoiced (John

8:56). Jesus Christ is of the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16).

In a lineal sense, two groups are called the "seed of Abraham" in scripture. The first comprises the literal descendants of Abraham through Isaac (Gen. 26:1–4) and Jacob (Gen. 28; 35:9–13), who are thus the twelve tribes of Israel. The second comprises the descendants of Ishmael and the many other children of Abraham.

In addition to those who are of lineal descent, all who are not of Abrahamic lineage but who become adopted by their acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and continued obedience to God's commandments are heirs of all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (*TPJS*, pp. 149–50). Adoption is completed by the gospel ordinances, including baptism and confirmation; ordination to the PRIESTHOOD, and magnifying one's calling in the priesthood; the TEMPLE ENDOWMENT; and eternal MARRIAGE, through which husbands, wives, and families share "all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Modern REVELATION assures that these people will have a fulness of blessings, even "all that [the] Father hath" (D&C 84:38). They are "sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies," and they become "the seed of Abraham" (D&C 84:34).

[See also Abrahamic Covenant; Gospel of Abraham.]

ALLEN C. OSTERGAR, JR.

SEER

In ancient usage, "seer" is an alternative term for PROPHET (1 Sam. 9:9). A seer is a person endowed by God with a special gift for seeing spiritually. In the modern Church, members of the FIRST PRESIDENCY and the QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES serve as seers. These fifteen apostolic officials are designated PROPHETS, SEERS, AND REVELATORS who direct the Church by means of divine REVELATION, with the President of the Church being the only one in whom the keys are fully active at any one time. Though all three titles describe revelatory capacity, the terms are not fully synonymous. A "prophet" is one who speaks for GOD; the office of "seer" extends that divine endowment to a capacity for envisioning future and past. The Book of Mormon teaches that a "seer is greater than a prophet," because a seer is "a

revelator and a prophet also”; seers are unique among prophets in that they “can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed” (Mosiah 8:15–17).

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Prophet Joseph SMITH refers to the spiritual process of seership. He describes “being in the Spirit” along with Sidney RIGDON, and “by the power of the Spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings were enlightened, so as to see and understand the things of God” (76:11–12; cf. JS—H 1:74).

The office of seer is often associated with the use of revelatory instruments, particularly the URIM AND THUMMIM, sometimes called SEER STONES. The Book of Mormon suggests that “who-soever has these things is called seer, after the manner of old times” (Mosiah 28:16).

Visionary prophets of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, and John the Revelator, clearly functioned as seers. In the Book of Mormon, LEHI refers to Joseph of Egypt as a seer who foresaw that in modern times God would raise up from among his descendants yet another “choice seer” (2 Ne. 3:6). The ancient calling of seer remains active through modern times. A seer is “one who sees with spiritual eyes. He perceives the meaning of that which seems obscure to others. . .

In short, he is one who sees, who walks in the Lord’s light with open eyes” (Widtsoe, p. 205).

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STEVEN C. WALKER

SEER STONES

Joseph SMITH wrote that in 1823 an angel told him about “two stones in silver bows . . . fastened to a breastplate . . . the possession and use of [which] constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times” (JS—H 1:35). Joseph used these and other seer stones that he found in various ways (occasionally referred to by the biblical term URIM AND THUMMIM) for several purposes, primarily in translating the Book of Mormon and receiving revelations (see HC 1:21–23, 33, 36, 45, 49; 3:28; 5:xxxii; CHC 6:230–31).

Historical sources suggest that effective use of the instruments required Joseph to be at peace with God and his fellowmen, to exercise faith in God, and to exert mental effort (CHC 1:128–33). Otherwise, little is said authoritatively about their operation. Occasionally, people have been deceived by trying to use stones to receive revelation, the best-known latter-day example in the Church being Hiram Page (D&C 28:11–12).

While useful in translating and receiving revelation, seer stones are not essential to those processes. Elder Orson Pratt reported that Joseph Smith told him that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced as a translator but that he later progressed to the point that he no longer needed the instrument (“Two Days’ Meeting at Brigham City,” *Millennial Star* 36 [1874]:498–99).

RICHARD E. TURLEY, JR.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY (SELF-RELIANCE)

The term “self-sufficiency” refers to a principle underlying the LDS program of WELFARE SERVICES, and to an ideal of social experience. Self-sufficiency is the ability to maintain one’s self and relates to women and men being agents for themselves. Independence and self-sufficiency are critical keys to spiritual and temporal growth. A situation that threatens one’s ability to be self-sufficient also threatens one’s confidence, self-esteem, and freedom. As dependence is increased, the freedom to act is decreased.

Church writings often use the terms self-sufficiency and “self-reliance” interchangeably. Teachings pertaining to Welfare Services emphasize and place considerable importance on both individual and family independence. Six principles form the foundation of the infrastructure of the welfare program. Three of these principles emphasize responsibility to care for one’s own needs: work, self-reliance, and stewardship; the other three focus on responsibility to others: love, service, and consecration (Faust, p. 91).

President Spencer W. KIMBALL defined Welfare Services as the “essence of the Gospel . . . the Gospel in action” (Kimball, p. 77). Within the context of welfare, the term self-sufficiency also includes an emphasis on prevention, temporary