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Latter-day Saints, Church of Jesus Christ of

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Latter-day Saints Today and Their Theological Views. Envisioned as the final incarnation of Christ's church, the Latter-day Saints preach the centrality of Christ and his atoning* sacrifice in the soul's* progression from pre-mortal existence through earthly incarnation and toward celestial glory. Through faith in Christ's atonement and by obedience to his laws and ordinances, such exalted men and women, married or "sealed" together for eternity, become like God, enjoying eternal life and a continuing posterity. In addition to the Book of Mormon*, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price contain revelations and ancient writings revealed to Smith and his successors and, along with the Bible, constitute the Latter-day Saints' canon of scripture.

Mormons support a vigorous missionary effort (some 60,000 self-supporting missionaries serve for 18–24 months), subscribe to a stringent health code (no coffee, tea, alcohol, or tobacco), commit themselves to a life of chastity (no pre- or extramarital sex), and are expected to contribute 10% of their gross income to the Church. These demands, coupled with a history of "gathering" (that frequently overwhelmed and threatened old settlers) and recurrent oppression, combine to produce a Mormon culture that is intensely cohesive. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of annual converts make the group's constitution dynamic and fluid.

Organizationally, the church is hierarchical and centralized. From headquarters in Salt Lake City, a prophet and two counselors receive "continuing revelation" to lead the Church. Next in authority are the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and several Quorums of Seventy, all of whom, as worldwide or "general" authorities, preside over a membership that has been growing at a prodigious rate (from 3.1 million in 1970 to 8 million in 1995, according to *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2001). More than half of their members live outside the USA, and that proportion will continue to increase because Mormon conversion rates are the highest in Latin America and Africa.

Smaller bodies of Mormons include the "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" (claiming direct continuity with Joseph Smith; centered in Independence, Missouri), "Temple Lot," "Bickertonites," and "Strangites." **See also MORMON, BOOK OF; MORMON WORSHIP; SMITH, JOSEPH; YOUNG, BRIGHAM.**

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