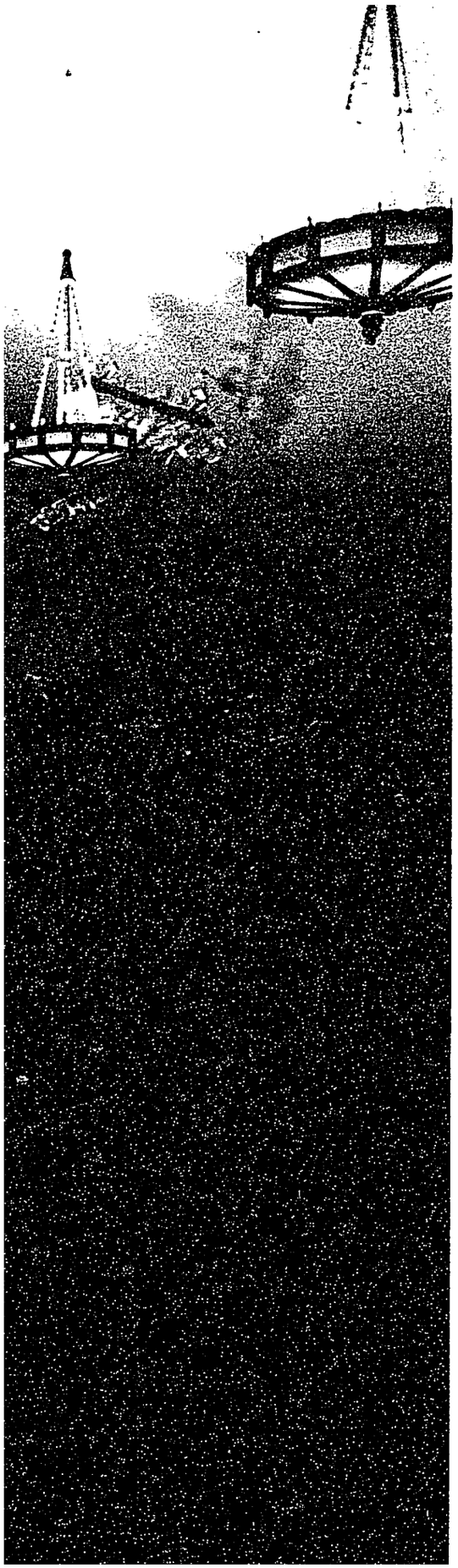


The MORMONS

Growth, Prosperity and Controversy

By Robert Lindsey

LIGHT SNOW AND HAIL FELL AS MORE than 6,000 mourners crowded into a cavernous, gilded church in Salt Lake City on a chilly Saturday in early November. Outside, thousands of others stood in the cold, trying to share a moment of history with those inside.

As the 325 voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir filled the church, thousands, perhaps millions, of other Mormons across the country and in Canada participated vicariously in the funeral rites for their patriarchal leader via satellite-relayed television and radio broadcasts.

Spencer Woolley Kimball, prophet, seer, revelator and President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — the Mormons — was eulogized as a "noble example of what the Lord expects of all of us."

The following day, in accordance with church tradition, the man who spoke those words, Ezra Taft Benson, the senior member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, which rules the church, was elected Kimball's successor.

Benson, a political conservative whose name became familiar during the 1950's when he was Secretary of Agriculture under President Eisenhower, inherited absolute authority over a unique American institution.

A century ago, the Mormon church was a small, persecuted religious cult whose leaders were being hunted down by Federal marshals as illegal polygamists. It is now the fastest-growing church among the major denominations in the United States and one of the richest.

From a largely rural sect with roots in the American frontier, Mormonism has become a predominantly urban faith, controlled by an expanding bu-

Robert Lindsey, based in San Francisco, is The Times's chief West Coast correspondent.

April 1985. Members gather at the Mormon Tabernacle for a semiannual meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Once small and rural, the church is now rich and predominantly urban.

RAVELL CALL/DESERET NEWS

Mormons account for less than 2 percent of the population, yet they wield increasing, and conservative, influence in the U.S.

structed to do so by divine revelation, banned the practice of polygamy. A law prohibiting "plural marriages," as Mormons call the practice, had been passed by Congress and upheld by the Supreme Court. Barring polygamy was the price demanded by Washington for Utah's admission to statehood, and the church leaders complied, abolishing one of the foundations of early Mormon doctrine.

On June 9, 1978, Kimball said God had revealed to him that black males, formerly excluded because they carried "the curse of Cain," should be given full status in the church. The decision not only improved the church's public standing at a time of growing criticism in the aftermath of the 1960's civil rights movement, it also opened the way for expanded missionary work in Africa and Latin America.

RISING 28 STORIES, THE OFFICE BUILDING OF the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City is the tallest building in Utah. Its top floors look down on the dome of the State Capitol, less than a mile away.

Brigham Young brought members of the church to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. His legacy is a state that is the closest thing to a theocracy America has produced. Seventy percent of Utah's residents are Mormons, and the church dominates its political, social and business life.

From the skyscraper overlooking the city and the nearby Wasatch Mountains, hundreds of Mormon bureaucrats manage farflung ecclesiastical and economic enterprises. Nearby, on Temple Square, are the piercing Gothic spires of the mother temple and the domed Mormon Tabernacle where each Sunday morning the famous choir performs on a nationally broadcast radio program. Almost lost amid this architecture is a more modest, 75-year-old building where the senior elders of the church exercise absolute authority over the Mormon flock.

At the top of the theocracy is Benson, 86, who as the president, prophet, seer and revelator, is said to speak with the word of God. Next in line are two presidential counselors, who share with Benson the office of the First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, 75, who runs the church on a day-to-day basis, and Thomas S. Monson, 58, a former publisher of the church-owned Salt Lake City newspaper, The Deseret News.

The next tier is the Council of the Twelve Apostles, followed by the First Quorum of the Seventy. Collectively, all are known as the General Authorities of the church.

Recently, two of the apostles greeted a visitor in a

Mormon missionaries making their rounds in Hawaii. Following their customary two-year travels in search of converts, the young missionaries are often courted by the C.I.A. and F.B.I.

TOM SMART/DESERET NEWS

24

wood-paneled office in the administration building. The visit came at a difficult time for the church.

Documents from its earliest days, which some viewed as a kind of Mormon Dead Sea Scrolls, had surfaced and seemed to place in doubt some of the church's fundamental teachings. Worse, two Mormons involved in the search for such documents had been murdered and a third narrowly escaped death.

Moreover, Mormons were under increasingly bitter attack from Southern Baptists and Christian evangelical sects who view the church as competitors and "un-Christian." Thousands of people each month were being shown a movie produced by ex-Mormons called "The God Makers," that assailed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "one of the most dangerous and deceptive groups in the world." The film depicts it as a rich cult that dabbles in pagan practices and the occult, distorts its history, brainwashes its members, subjugates its female members and bases its beliefs on scripture that "is a fairy tale, just like Alice in Wonderland."

In Israel, Orthodox Jews have rioted over efforts by the church to expand a Brigham Young University study center in Jerusalem, which they view as a beachhead from which the Mormons plan to launch a massive effort to convert Jews.

When they received their visitor, the apostles, Neal A. Maxwell, 59, a former executive vice president of the University of Utah, and Boyd K. Packer, 61, a trustee of the church's Brigham Young University, were dressed in dark business suits, like those worn by their young missionaries.

The Mormons, they said, had been accustomed to criticism by outsiders since their earliest days. After decades of being "quiescent," anti-Mormon feelings were now on the rise, Maxwell said. But it was to be expected, he added, because Mormon dogma diverges so much from conventional Christian thought. "It's hard to be noticed on a pastel landscape," he said. "If we were nonsmoking humanists, nobody would pay any attention to us."

IF THERE IS AN AMERica that embodies the vision that Ronald Reagan has for his country — a nation of pious, striving, self-reliant and politically conservative "traditional" families where men work hard at their jobs and women work hard in the home raising their children — it is in Mormon country.

Mormonism is more than simply a religion that serves as broker between man and God. In the lives of its members, Mormonism is a pervasive spiritual and social presence. It not only promises members an afterlife but also envelops them in an earthly womb that includes emphasis on strong families, stable marriages, and a close community working together to achieve material success. Mormonism, says Peggy Fletcher, publisher of Sunstone, a journal of liberal Mormon thought that is not connected to the church, "is unambiguous, simple and straightforward when life is full of ambiguity and chaos."

In return, the church demands conformity and obedience. It is not a democracy. It expects members to have large families — typically, four children; often, six or eight. Members may not smoke or drink alcohol, coffee, tea or even soft drinks containing caffeine. The church tells them how to dress, how they should cut their hair and what their sexual practices should be.

A church founded by men who took multiple wives and, according to some historical accounts, sometimes persuaded women to submit to them sexually with the promise of eternal salvation, is now one of the most puritanical. "In Mormon theology," says a pamphlet explaining the church's precepts, "adultery is next to murder in gravity."

For a devout Mormon family, life is a constant round of social and religious meetings, all with the purpose, one way or another, of helping members get to heaven. According to Mormon doctrine, Jesus will someday return to rule the earth. When He does, He will turn for help to members of His "only true church." All humans will be resurrected physically and joined with their spirits; if found worthy, they may also be reunited with their families. Everyone will be admitted to one of three heavenly kingdoms, but only the most worthy will be eligible for the highest of these kingdoms. Some will become godlike and redeem other planets, just as thousands of years ago Jesus was sent to earth to become its Redeemer.

From early childhood, Mor-

(Continued on Page 38)

MORMONS

Continued from Page 24

mons are warned to prepare for the millennium, to achieve "perfection" in their lives, to follow the Ten Commandments and to obey unquestioningly the church's teachings and the words of the current prophet, seer and revelator.

At the age of 12, males in good standing are eligible for ordination into the priesthood. As long as they remain "worthy," they have the authority to act in the name of God and participate in the rituals of the church.

Females are excluded from the priesthood, but can enter heaven if they have led exemplary lives. They cannot reach the highest of the celestial kingdoms, however, unless both they and their husbands are judged worthy.

Any member who violates church directives on doctrine, morality or life style, who challenges the word of the hierarchy, who declines to pay 10 percent of his income to the church, or otherwise fails to pass muster in the eyes of his local lay bishop, faces serious ecclesiastical consquences.

The bishop can deprive him of a "temple recommend," the right to enter the temple where Mormons must go if they are to complete the rites necessary to insure for themselves, their families and their ancestors a place in heaven.

Sunday services at a Mormon church do not vary a great deal from any Christian denomination: the weekly sermon might include a few words from a lay bishop or congregation member about the importance of living a good life, and there are hymns and a communion service.

But the rituals that are held at the temples — which contain clusters of elaborately decorated rooms, including some meant to remind members of heaven — are a unique part of Mormonism. Some of these rituals are similar to rites of the Masonic Lodge, to which many of the early Mormons belonged. Mormons in good standing visit their temple (normally on any day except Sunday) to be married in a complex ceremony in which they are said to be "sealed for time and all eternity" and to participate in what the church calls "vicarious work on behalf of the dead."

In these rites, they act as stand-ins for ancestors during baptisms and marriages, so that these people may have the same chance of an eternal life as do living Mormons. To help members identify their ancestors, the church operates the largest and most comprehensive genealogical library in the world.

Though the Mormons face a new wave of criticism from outsiders, some members, academicians and others who follow Mormon affairs, have been arguing that the church's biggest problems are more internal than external: difficulties managing its rapid growth, especially overseas; an undermining of its teaching caused by changing sexual mores and other social currents; a loss of members to splinter groups that claim the right to practice polygamy; intellectual ferment within its ranks that refuses to die despite efforts to quell it, and a budding restiveness among some Mormon women over the role defined for them by the church.

And, though many maintain that the loyalty of its members runs so deep that there is little reason for the church to worry, recent events suggest that some members of the hierarchy are haunted by a fear that the church could be destroyed by research into its past.

ACCORDING TO MORmon doctrine, an 18-year-old Palmyra, N.Y., youth named Joseph Smith Jr. was visited in 1823 by an angel named Moroni, who led him to a cache of gold plates that the angel had buried in 421 A.D.

Four years later, Moroni allowed Smith, with the help of special devices and two scribes, to translate the reformed Egyptian characters that were printed on the plates. They told how a group had migrated from what is now Israel to the Americas before the time of Christ and had created a thriving civilization.

Jesus was said to have visited the New World following His Resurrection and left a message that Smith interpreted as a call to establish a church in His name in the United States. Smith was to call the story that he transcribed the Book of Mormon, and it was to become the cornerstone of the new faith.

As the church grew from a tiny frontier sect to a farflung international organization, successive generations of Mormon leaders steadfastly maintained that the Book of Mormon was literally true, and that the church must stand or fall on its accuracy as the revealed word of God. Last October, Ezra Benson called it "the most correct book on earth."

In 1909, one of the church's most respected historians, Brigham H. Roberts, wrote: "If the origin of the Book of Mormon could be proved to be other than that set forth by Joseph Smith ... then the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and its message and doctrines, which in some respects may be said to have arisen out of the Book of Mormon, must fall."

Mormonism has long had an obsession with history. Joseph Smith instructed his followers to make copious

Major Church Holdings

ONLY A HANDFUL OF high officials and senior members of a management team that runs the far-flung Mormon business empire know precisely how rich the church is. When members of the Council of Twelve Apostles are asked to place a value on the church's assets or to estimate its income, they say the church never discusses its financial affairs with outsiders.

Public records, nevertheless, indicate that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is enormously wealthy, richer probably than any religious organization in the nation except the Roman Catholic Church.

In "The Mormon Corporate Empire," to be published in March by Beacon Press, authors John Heinerman and Anson Shupe estimate the church's total assets at nearly $8 billion and its yearly income at about $2 billion, about 75 percent of it from tithing and offerings.

Besides temples, churches and other religious facilities around the world, the church owns television and radio stations, a daily newspaper, insurance companies, more than 800,000 acres of working farmland, a company that develops industrial parks, several food processing plants, department stores, office buildings, real estate investments and a portfolio of stocks and bonds said to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Many of the church's properties are controlled by an umbrella company, the Deseret Management Corporation.

Among the major Mormon interests are the following.

Insurance

The Beneficial Life Insurance Company

The Continental Western Life Insurance Company

The Western American Life Insurance Company

The Utah Home Fire Insurance Company

Television stations

KSL-TV, Salt Lake City (CBS affiliate)

KIRO-TV, Seattle (CBS affiliate)

Radio stations

KSL-AM, Salt Lake City
KIRO-AM/KSEA-FM, Seattle
WRFM, New York
WCLR-FM, Chicago
KOIT-AM/FM, San Francisco
KBIG-FM, Los Angeles
KAAM-AM/KAFM-FM, Dallas
KMBZ-AM/KMBR-FM, Kansas City, Mo.

All of the stations are operated by the Bonneville International Corporation, a church subsidiary, which also owns the Bonneville Satellite Corporation, the Bonneville Entertainment Corporation and Bonneville Productions Inc., along with other smaller operating divisions.

Publishing

The Deseret News
The Deseret Press
The Deseret Book Company
Brigham Young University Press

Agribusiness

Along with several food-processing plants, the church has vast agricultural acreage, mostly held by:

U.I. Group, Utah (the church is majority stockholder)
Deseret Ranch of Canada
Elberta Farm, Utah
Deseret Farms of California
Deseret Land and Livestock, Utah
Deseret Farms of Texas
Deseret Ranch of Florida
Templeview Farms, New Zealand

Commercial real estate

The church's commercial properties, as well as much of its assets in agribusiness, are held by two divisions, Zions Securities and the Beneficial Development Company. These include about 60 acres in downtown Salt Lake City and a number of buildings on this property, including the Hotel Utah and Temple Square Hotel; a shopping mall, and the Kennecott Building, headquarters for the Kennecott Company.

In an effort to spur development in Salt Lake City, the church several years ago sold part of the site to the family of Adnan Khashoggi, the Saudi Arabian financier, which is developing it as an office-retail complex called Triad Center. The Bonneville International Corporation is one of the facility's major tenants.

Among other church assets are more than 50 percent of the stock of the Zion Cooperative Mercantile Institution, a retail chain that owns nine department stores in Utah; the Northland Business Park, being developed by the Beneficial Development Company on part of the church's 4,400 acres near Kansas City, and the Polynesian Cultural Center, a theme park for tourists in Hawaii that provides jobs to church converts from the Pacific islands.

ROBERT LINDSEY

records, to keep letters, diaries and other documents for posterity. Many did, not only in the early years of the church, but after Smith was murdered by a lynch mob in Carthage, Ill., in 1844 and his successor, Brigham Young, led the persecuted Mormons to the Salt Lake Valley three years later. This wealth of documents would later create a cottage industry for historians studying the westward movement and other aspects of 19th-century American life.

Over the past decade, and especially in the past year or so, many of the fundamental tenets of Mormon theology have been challenged. Anthropologists and geologists, for example, have found increasing evidence to support a theory that American Indians are descendants of people who migrated from Asia via a now-flooded continental land bridge from Siberia to Alaska, not from Israel in small boats, as the Mormons claim.

But the greatest challenges have come from within the Mormon community itself. In November, the University of Illinois Press released "Studies of the Book of Mormon," which contains a previously unpublished study by Brigham H. Roberts in which he showed how the Book of Mormon is remarkably similar to another book, "View of the Hebrews," written in 1823 by a Christian minister, Ethan Smith. Roberts would later defend the Book of Mormon. But on page after page of the newly published study, which he sent to church authorities in the 1920's with an appeal for help in resolving his doubts, he pointed out similarities, "coincidences" and identical language in the two volumes. He suggested that Smith, who he called a youth with "an unusually powerful faculty of imagination," had fabricated the Book of Mormon.

Last May, Mormon leaders acknowledged possession of two letters that raised other questions about Mormon orthodoxy. By then, rumors of the letters' existence had already filtered out of the church bureaucracy.

The first, written in 1830 by Martin Harris, Smith's close associate, to a friend, gives an account of the discovery of the gold plates that departs substantially from the one presented to church members. Harris recalled hearing a rumor in 1827 that Joseph Smith had found a gold bible, then wrote:

"I take Joseph aside & he says it is true. I found it 4 years ago with my stone but only just got it because of the enchantment. The old spirit come to me 3 times in the same dream & says dig up the gold but when I take it up the next morning the spirit transfigured himself from a white salamander in the bottom of the hole and struck me 3 times. . ."

The letter had been donated to the church by a Salt Lake City businessman and Mormon bishop, Steven F. Christensen, who said he had purchased it in January 1984 from two local document collectors, Lyn Jacobs and Mark W. Hofmann. He said that he and another local businessman, J. Gary Sheets, had subsequently spent $20,000 on research that proved it was authentic.

In mythology, the salamander is a creature resembling a lizard capable of living in or enduring fire — a characterization, church officials contended, that did not preclude its use to describe an angel. Still, Harris's story was far different from the glorious religious experience described in Mormon theology. If Harris's letter was the Mormon equivalent of a Dead Sea Scroll, it was not the contemporary evidence Mormon leaders would have wanted most to prove the church's doctrine.

A week after Harris's letter was made public, Mormon officials, under questioning from local reporters, released a letter written by Joseph Smith to a friend in 1825. They said it had been purchased more than a year earlier from Hofmann, the Salt Lake City document collector, by Gordon B. Hinckley, one of the church's three top officials. Hinckley had kept it in a church vault.

Smith appears in the letter to be obsessed with finding buried treasure guarded by "spirits," creating much the same image conveyed in Harris's letter and lending some credence to church critics who claim Smith was an imaginative dabbler in folk magic.

Although the letters produced a lot of publicity, many Mormons and outsiders who know the church have insisted that they would have virtually no effect on the faith of the vast majority of church members, whose fealty runs deep and is based on more than belief in the official doctrine.

"Mormonism is not simply a commitment to a theology or a church practice, but a social-cultural order," said Sterling M. McMurrin, a Mormon philosopher and the E.E. Ericksen Distinguished Professor of History at the University of Utah. "It becomes part of a person's second nature; he belongs to the church like he belongs to his family, and he does not quit his family because someone in it turns out to be a rascal."

Jan Shipps, a leading non-Mormon historian of the church, agreed. A professor and director of the Center for American Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, she said: "Religions have an almost infinite capacity to explain things away." Mormonism, as a church of revelation, she said, can always revise its doctrines to accommodate new information. All it takes is a few words from the current prophet, seer and revelator.

Nevertheless, at least some

members of the Mormon hierarchy appear to have been growing increasingly troubled that old documents and research into the church's past, could undermine members' faith.

These fears apparently began to harden in the early 1980's, when Mormon elders ordered the closing of certain church archives to scholars they regarded as unfriendly to the church. They also disbanded a team of professional historians that Ezra Benson, then an apostle, had condemned for attempting "to inordinately humanize the prophets of God so that their human frailties become more evident than their spiritual qualities."

Davis Bitton, a history professor at the University of Utah and a member of the church historical team that was dissolved in 1982, said members had been allowed considerable freedom early in the group's 10-year existence. But as time passed, they were progressively denied access to certain documents and church authorities increasingly pressured them not to publish work on topics such as polygamy that might embarrass the modern church. They were also forced to "sanitize" reports that might show early church leaders or the official doctrine in a dim light.

Bitton said one member of the department, a librarian, regularly checked writings of church historians, "underlined passages he considered inappropriate and sent these annotated copies to his personal contacts within the General Authorities."

Stanley R. Larson, a New Testament scholar who lives in a Salt Lake City suburb, says he was forced from his job in the church's translations department this fall after writing a paper that concluded that the text of a speech attributed to Jesus in the Book of Mormon had probably been copied from a King James version of the Bible. The speech, Larson said, contains mistakes in translation identical to those found in copies of the Bible available in Joseph Smith's time. "Stan has a new job now, and he's happy," said Larson's wife, Patricia, who, like him, is a Mormon. "Now he's free to think for himself."

Mormon leaders defend the limits placed on historians by saying that any research published by church employees carries the church's official imprimatur and that they do not want to be in a position of seeming to endorse material contrary to official view. Historians with the proper "degree of commitment for the church" may have access to Mormon archives, Elder Maxwell said.

In June, Gordon Hinckley, in a speech relayed by satellite to Mormon young adults around the country, declared that the church encouraged "individual freedom of inquiry, thought and expression." But he assailed those who were "poking into all the crevices of our history, ferreting out little things of small import and magnifying them into great issues of public discussion, working the media in an effort to give credibility to their efforts." The recently discovered letters, Hinckley said, "have no real relevancy to the question of the authenticity of the church or the divine origin of the Book of Mormon."

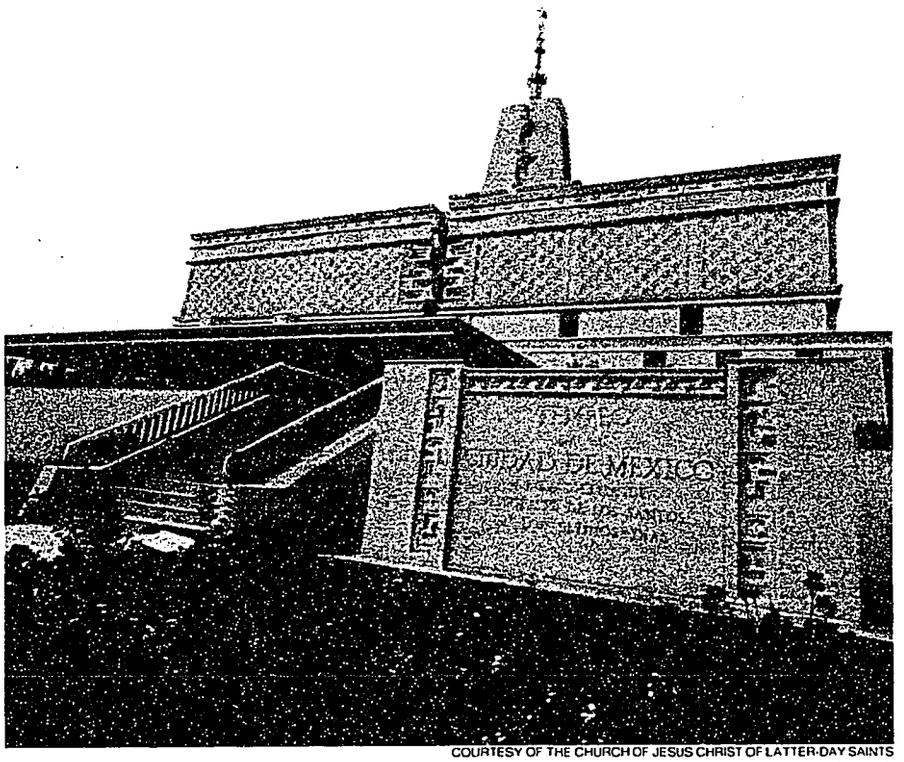
In a speech at Brigham Young University in August, Dallin H. Oaks, an elder of the church, told Mormons to look skeptically at news reports and new histories of the Mormons, calling them often biased and told out of context.

Satan, he said, "can use truth to promote his purposes" and "the fact that something is true is not always a justification for communicating it."

Oaks, who served as president of Brigham Young University, as a justice on the Utah Supreme Court and as chairman of the board of Public Broadcasting Service before being made an apostle in 1984, added:

"Criticism is particularly objectionable when it is directed toward church authorities; it is one thing to deprecate a person who exercises corporate power or even government power; it is quite another thing to criticize or deprecate a person for the performance of an office to which he or she has been called of God. It does not matter that the criticism is true."

On Oct. 6, speaking at the church's



COURTESY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The temple in Mexico City, dedicated in 1983, is part of the growing Mormon presence abroad.

annual fall conference, apostle James E. Faust sent a strong warning to the flock. Mormons, he said, who were questioning official accounts of Joseph Smith's experiences or were challenging "his successors or any of the fundamental, settled doctrines" of the church could be doing so at "spiritual peril."

AT ABOUT 8:15 A.M. on Oct. 15, Steven Christensen, the 31-year-old Salt Lake City investment counselor and Mormon bishop who had donated the Martin Harris letter to the church, arrived at his sixth-floor office in the Judge Building, a few blocks from the mother church at Temple Square.

He leaned over to pick up a package addressed to him that was on the floor in front of his office. It exploded, hurling his body through his office door and puncturing it with a fusillade of hardened-steel cement nails.

Later that morning, Kathleen W. Sheets, 50, whose husband had helped Christensen authenticate the Harris letter, returned to the family's home in a well-to-do Salt Lake City suburb after a trip to the bank. A package was waiting near the house. She picked it up and it exploded, killing her instantly.

Later that day, a police official said, "These are our suspects," and held up a lengthy computer printout listing investors in a troubled financial company headed by Mrs. Sheets's husband and with which Christensen had once been affiliated.

But that afternoon, police subsequently learned, a series of events began that added another dimension to the murder investigation and seemed to rule out the investors. At about 2:50 P.M., Mark Hofmann, who had located the Martin Harris and the Joseph Smith letters, arrived at the world headquarters of the church. The 30-year-old Hoffman was a former missionary who had turned an adolescent preoccupation with church history into a prosperous business.

At the headquarters, he asked to see Hugh W. Pinnock, an elder and member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Pinnock was not there, but apostle Dallin H. Oaks agreed to see him.

Oaks later said that he recognized Hofmann's name because Pinnock had told him that he and Steven Christensen had been trying to purchase a set of documents from the early days of the church known as the McLellin Collection.

This collection, long rumored to exist, was said to contain letters and other materials compiled by a contemporary of Joseph Smith's, William E. McLellin, including some with possibly damaging comments about Smith and Mormonism.

Oaks said Hofmann was planning to sell the collection to an unidentified person who intended to donate it to the church. The sale was scheduled to take place the following day.

According to Pinnock, Christensen had introduced him to Hofmann the previous June, and Pinnock had agreed to help Hofmann raise $185,000 to buy the McLellin Collection from an unidentified source in Texas.

Pinnock, a former director of the First Interstate Bank in Salt Lake City, said he called a bank officer who agreed to lend the money to Hofmann. (After the bombings, Pinnock said he had repaid the loan from his own funds.)

According to Oaks, when Hofmann visited church headquarters on the afternoon of the bombings, he told Oaks he expected to be questioned by the police regarding the murders. "He said he was worried about what he should say to them," said Oaks. "I told him he should just answer their questions and tell them the truth." After about 10 minutes, Oaks said, Hofmann left.

Police said the unidentified church member who had agreed to buy the documents from Hofmann and then give them to the church had drawn a check for $185,000 and planned to purchase them at 2 P.M. on Oct. 16.

At 2:40 P.M. that day, a bomb detonated two blocks from the church's headquarters and blew apart a small car, severely injuring its owner — Mark Hofmann.

Within hours, police officials said that Hofmann had been the principal suspect in the bombing murders the day before and, while carrying a third bomb, "blew himself up."

Hofmann denied it and was not charged with the murders. However, he and a 28-year-old friend, Shannon Flynn, were charged with possession of an illegal weapon, an Israeli-made Uzi submachine gun, allegedly found at Flynn's home. Following the bombings, Flynn had also asked church officials for advice on what he should tell the police.

Nearly three months after the murders, the question of who planted the bombs remains a mystery. Police officials still maintain that Hofmann is their leading suspect, but independent polygraph experts say he easily passed a lie detector test in which he disclaimed culpability.

Rumors have circulated in Salt Lake City that a secret group of right-wing Mormons was somehow involved in the deaths. Hofmann has refused to discuss the case with reporters, but according to a friend, he believes a "religious crackpot" unhappy with his commerce in documents from the Mormon past may have set the bombs.

In the ensuing weeks, members of a Texas family said they had the McLellin Collection in a safe-deposit box and had never heard of Mark Hofmann before the bombings.

Nothing has surfaced to link church leaders in any way to the murders. But during the investigation, it has become evident that high officials of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were doing a brisk business with Hofmann.

Hinckley said at a press conference that, starting in 1980, he had purchased about 40 documents from Hofmann. Only a few of them have been made public; others are in a church vault. Whether they

(Continued on Page 46)

MORMONS

Continued from Page 43

cast any new light on the church's past is not known.

Whatever the outcome of the investigation, few people expect the church hierarchy to relax its resistence to efforts to rewrite its history. "When all is said and done," Hinckley told a church conference recently, "the only real wealth of the church is the faith of its people."

TO MANY MORMONS, a much more important question than who planted the bombs is: In what direction will Ezra Taft Benson take them?

The answer: Probably to the right, but not as far as some church critics expect.

For much of his life, Benson has had close personal ties to the John Birch Society and similiar conservative organizations. At various times, he has attributed the nation's civil-rights movement to "Communists" and questioned whether it was possible to be a good Mormon and a liberal Democrat at the same time. He has also been a leading force in the church hierarchy seeking to crack down on dissenters and historical revisionists.

Yet, insiders say, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is run on a much more collegial basis by the Council of the Twelve Apostles than many non-Mormons realize. Many of the most recently appointed apostles are less dogmatic than Benson is, and because of his age, Benson may turn over much of the day-to-day operation of the church to Hinckley, considered a moderate by Mormon standards.

According to this view, there will be no more change in the course of the church than there would be at any large, successful corporate entity being taken over by new management. In his first public statement as prophet, seer and revelator, Benson seemed anxious to change his image as an archconservative when he said: "I love all our Father's children of every color, creed and political persuasion."

Still, others argue that Benson's personal feelings run too deeply for him to tolerate any significant dissent. Almost no one expects him to grant Mormon women full ecclesiastical equality with men as priests of the church, which many have sought.

On one thing, Benson and the Council of Twelve Apostles seem in full accord — a strong belief in the need to protect the "traditional family," which means resistance to pornography, homosexuality, abortion and women working outside the home, among other things.

It is a battle that the church has been losing to some extent. Despite the pervasive presence of the church in Utah, the state's divorce rate is higher than the national average. While the rate of alcoholism is lower than the national average, social workers say Utah has serious problems with drug abuse, child abuse and teen-age pregnancies.

Church pressure on women to stay home with their children notwithstanding, a Federal survey in 1984 found that 54.4 percent of Utah women over the age of 16 worked outside the home, higher than the national average.

"In the past two or three years, we've taken some steps backwards," said Linda King Newell, who with her husband, Jackson, edits Dialogue, a journal unaffiliated with the church that often questions its official line.

The church, she said, had tried but not succeeded in halting efforts to probe into its past. Like some other Mormon observers, she maintains the church hierarchy has married itself too firmly to the literalness of the Book of Mormon. "History doesn't change, but what we know about it does change." If honest scholarship proved that some Mormon doctrines were faulty, she said, the church could adjust to it and perhaps even be strengthened by it. But she said she didn't expect much assistance from the men who run the church. "Change comes two ways in the Mormon Church," she said. "Slowly or not at all." ■