

## MORMON TIME

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The Harvard Values Project carried on in New Mexico during the 1950's attempted to measure orientation to time. The temporal dimension was subdivided three ways, past, present, and future, and primary and secondary foci for the cultural groups of the area were recorded. Mormons were found to be principally oriented to the future and secondarily to the present. The same is assumed to be true of Americans generally, and it is further assumed that this orientation is the product of world-rejecting Christianity which emphasizes the greater desirability of the next life. Future-Time orientation is also the product of Protestant ideas on the nature of earthly perfection as a preparation for the other world after this one.

The Harvard Values study assumed that its division of the temporal spectrum could adequately cope with Mormon notions of time and that furthermore, Mormons -- unlike their surrounding ethnic groups, ~~the~~ but like most Americans, ~~were~~ were basically geared to the future, in the ultimate and proximate senses, not primarily to today. That view now seems to <sup>be</sup> essentially incorrect.

Mormons do not cut time into discreet chunks, but rather conceive of their personal place in a continu~~um~~ of time that was not created and that will carry them personally forward through a series of completely predictable stages. Further time brings with it progression and perfection. "To us the greatest time of all is today, it is the algebraic sum of all our

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Read at the August 1970 Pecos Conference, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

yesterdays and it holds the promise of all our tomorrows."\* (O'Dea 143)  
Mormons are caught up in an eternal progression of time in which both man and his environment in cooperation, actively become better than anything existing in the past. Today is invariably and inevitably better than yesterday. The earth, as planet and environment, is a created active entity which in concert with man's ministration cooperates in attaining perfection. The earth is not neutral, nor a garden meant for men, but an active willing force -- indeed it has a life of its own which is seen as dynamic, especially when in the hands of those willing to make it a fit place.

The Law of Eternal Progression encapsulates the Mormon's view of time and his place in it. Although Mormons explicitly disavow notions of Darwinian evolution, they possess a concept remarkably <sup>ably apt</sup> ~~not~~ for an evolutionary frame of reference. Not only must every individual become more perfect in the course of life, but the world must also. Increasing perfection refers not to the worlds after this one, but to the here and now.

Mormonism was founded as a version of American utopian socialism in the nineteenth century . And as all millennial movements, Mormonism postulated the rapid coming of the Savior, the second coming of Christ. Throughout the nineteenth century the immediacy of the Saintly preparations

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for Christ's reign on earth occupied them. For nineteenth century Mormons the future was very proximate, although it was to have a character very different from the present. For twentieth century Mormons the future as utopia or millenium has lost its immediacy. And concern for either the millenium or the year after next is not a pressing issue. For Mormons living in the twentieth century the future is now. Although no Mormon would be comfortable with the thought, Mormons are living the millenium right now. Mormons have always had an activist, present-time oriented religion, but with distinct and certain ideas about the future-life. The future has always been well-defined in both the immediate and long-term senses. What has happened now, however, is that Mormons have confused the immediate and the ultimate in the temporal dimension and the future has tended to be identified with the present. And the future life has been relegated to the safe range of the guaranteed hereafter. The now and the next are confused, but in that confusion comes an identification of the two, producing a primary concern with the immediate.

This is not the surprise it might be when one couples Mormonism with all the other religions of experience invented in the United States in the nineteenth century. Spiritualism, Christian Science and all the others are essentially oriented to this world, not the next. None is world-rejecting, although all talk about the hereafter. Religions of experience are oriented to sustaining flexible doctrine -- in fact, but not in theory -- that matches the changing circumstances and memberships they are subject to. Such branches of Christianity usually are composed of groups which are

economically marginal, or, as in the case with nineteenth century Mormons, ecologically marginal. Most of the Mormon heartland today is economically fragile, and certainly the Mormons along the Little Colorado in Arizona are even economically marginal. They are hit with the full brunt of every economic change suffered by the national economy and, in the course of having to make rapid and complete changes in economic bases, have evolved a set of conceptions enabling them to better adapt. Mixing the now and the next, conceiving of the future to be now creates a frame of mind that makes the present worthwhile, insures that maximum effort is geared to the immediate, allows the future to remain vague and unprescribed. And generally, maximally pre-adapts Mormons for coping with and even encouraging rapid technological and social change.

Since all phenomena are governed by laws for Mormons, including the earth and mankind, and since those laws procede indefinitely into the future, history is always realized in the present. It is expected that what was planned yesterday will in fact occur today. But similarly, because the future has always been close for Mormons and because the actual advent of the millenium has been dismissed as less than imminent, the actual nature of today as a place in time for Mormons has acquired a strange caste. The future so quickly becomes now that the next life -- or tomorrow -- is ever present. Part of this confusion between the now and the next comes through Mormon activist policy for the faithful. Coping with this environment will improve it, making a progressive advance to utopia. With

a concrete expectation of a utopia dimmed, the present has become, in so many words, the utopia of previous expectation. Mormons act as though there were nothing better than the now.

In witness of this hypothesis is the Mormon unconcern with the history of the church as an institution and of the people as a collectivity. Of the fairly large library on Mormons by Mormons there can be found no tradition of in-house historical scholarship. The institution has not produced its own history. That is singularly unlike most churches in Christendom. This is not to deny the vast concern with history seen in the average Mormon, who is avid to know more about the past, but mostly his own and his family's. There is a vast amount of historical data in the church, much of it published and easily available to the faithful (or anyone else).

The most active historically oriented work in the church is generalized. Mormons spend much time and energy building links to the past. The individual and his family build a kinship-based history to the past in the course of which links with other Mormons, the Church and mankind are built. But unlike histories that arrive at a collective view of the present with the individual as a fraction of it, Mormons view history as a pyramid with the individual builder at the peak resting on the mass of kin ties to the past. All the kin pyramids are linked to each other through biology and fictive kinship, creating a series of linked cones which individualize every Mormon, yet immerse him in a foundation of seemingly more valid roots to the past. Furthermore, Mormons do this historical work themselves; the church provides the data and the rationales. But it produces no

authoritative historiography to impede the fragmentation and inevitable amateurization history is subject to with this treatment.

With this historical approach, the individual cannot see himself as more than the apex of a pyramid. As a result, there exists, in the present, maximum variability of interpretations of the past. There are as many historical justifications at any point in the present as there are diverse, flexible and even contradictory life ways needing justification. Mormons have invented do-it-yourself history while eliminating all centralized sources that could possibly contradict error or impose uniformity. With the individual thus ever able to justify his current position, he can better cope with rapid economic change. With the past ever at his service, and the future ever at his command through inspiration/revelation, the Mormon lives in a cocoon of the present that cannot be punctured by either the past or the future since it is made up of both.

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MAG Aggressiveness	ECO Courage
MBR Broadmindedness	EDE Democracy
MCL Cleanliness	EEL Equality
+ MCM Competition	EEN Equanimity
MCN Concentration	- EEV Evolution
MEC Economy (efficiency)	EFA Faithfulness
MED Education	EFE Fellowship
MEN Enthusiasm	EFN Frankness
MEX Expertise	EFT Fraternity
MID Industry	EGC Good-Cheer
MII Initiative	EHE Helpfulness
+ MIT Intention (provident)	EID Idealism
MOB Obedience	EIV Individualism
MOP Optimism	EIT Integrity
MOR Orderliness	EIL Intelligence
MPA Patience	EJU Justice
- MPV Punctuality	EKD Kindness
+ MRE Rehabilitation	EKS Kinship
MSS Self-Sufficiency	+ ELO Loyalty
MSY System	+ EMA Mastership
+ MTH Thoroughness	EMY Mystery
+ MVI Vigilance	+ EPU Purpose
	ESC Self-control
	ESR Self-Reliance
	ESI Simplicity
VCS Common-sense	
VCO Cooperation	
VCR Courtesy	
+ VDE Dependability	
+ VEN Endurance	
VHU Humor	
VMU Mutuality (charity)	
+ VPE Perseverance	
VRA Reasonableness	
+ VRC Reciprocity	
+ VRG Resignation	
VRP Respect-Honor	
VSS Self-sacrifice	
VSR Service	
VTR Trustfulness	
+ VVI Vision	