

# Explorations in Mormon Social Character: Beyond the Liahona and Iron Rod

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RICHARD POLL, HANDS CLASPED, leaned forward and strained to clarify, with labored sensitivity, two kinds of ideal-typical Mormons, the Iron Rod member and the Liahona Saint, whose characteristics he had recently detailed in a controversial *IALOGUE* article (Poll 1967). His audience, a group of sociology graduate students of whom I was one, was attending a brown bag seminar in the statistics laboratory of BYU's Joseph F. Smith building. Surrounded by one-armed calculators and a computer card counter/sorter, we mobilized and paraded our insights, arguments, and questions.

The lunchtime discussion left me uncomfortable, as had my earlier reading of Poll's article. The source of my discomfort was not so much the claim that a committed member of the Church (a Liahona) could combine fellowship and doubt, but that in Poll's view, there were only two kinds of Latter-day Saints: his kind and the Iron Rods. In a retrospective article published in 1983, Poll reported many similar responses to the original article, responses that "came — and still come — from people who object to being pigeonholed. Their perspective was well expressed by a recent respondent, 'Is there not a continuum along which individuals may be categorized in terms of their interpretation and application of the gospel rather than being placed in a discrete category?' " (p. 71).

A continuum offers an attractive alternative to the simplicity of a dichotomy. I take, then, as my first task in this essay to construct a continuum from Poll's original faith-reason dichotomy and to characterize the continuum itself. I will also introduce another dimension to this attempt at Mormon social character exploration by adding a second continuum, that of social class location. Juxtaposing these two continua forms a matrix. Three definable points

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located along each continuum suggest a typology of nine different kinds of Latter-day Saints. I will discuss in detail three character types from the nine possibilities.

In the intellectual exercise that follows, I make every attempt to be academic and objective, but, as with Richard Poll, this is also a personal enterprise — to say “what the Church means to people like me.”

#### SOURCES OF PERSONAL DIRECTION

The original Liahona-Iron Rod division of the Saints counterposes reason and faith as primary sources of personal direction, but this categorization aggregates a variety of religious and intellectual experiences. The first step from dichotomy to typology is the untangling of these experiences.

Faith, for example, can be selective. Scriptural prophets may carry an intensity for which the more immediate messages of latter-day apostles cannot compensate. The *General Handbook of Instructions*, as an object of faith, can be an expeditious means of eliminating the static and interferes with the reception of the whisperings of the still small voice.

At the other end of the continuum, reason is no less multidimensional. What is logical (reasonable) has to compete in the marketplace with what actually works. What is called good or common sense, evolved from the laboratory of day-to-day experience, may conflict with the a priori formulations of less seasoned thinkers.

Even these brief considerations multiply by several factors the Mormon social types now represented by the Iron Rod-Liahona dichotomy. But rather than pushing at the limits of the definable points along the faith-reason continuum, I merely propose modifying the poles of the continuum and then identifying one additional location distinct from the original extremes.

The focal concern remains the primary source of one's personal direction. The Liahona reliance on reason-experience remains at one end of the continuum while at the other end are the stereotypical Iron Rods who rely on the institutional Church with its hierarchy of authorities as the core source of their personal direction. With disaffection from the continuum's poles an alternative third position emerges, a group I will call the Charismatics. Charismatics take a less mediated approach to religious experience by elevating the place of the Holy Spirit in their lives, not simply to confirm Church directives, but as an independent source of guidance and inspiration.

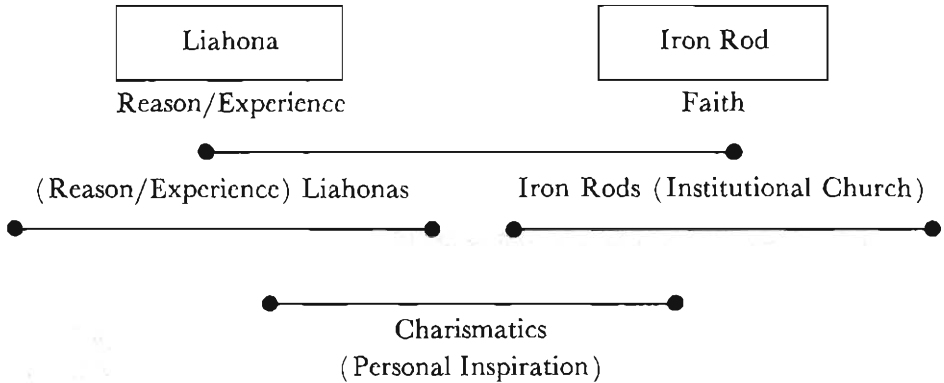
As seen in Figure 1, I have changed the conceptual space from a bounded dichotomy to overlapping continua. Although most faithful members accept all three sources of authority as legitimate, we differ in our habits of relying on one more than the others.

#### *Reason/Experience*

Poll characterizes the essential difference between the Liahona and Iron Rod Saints as one of answers and questions:

The Iron Rod Saint does not look for questions but for answers, and in the gospel — as he understands it — he finds or is confident that he can find the answer to

FIGURE 1  
SOURCES OF PERSONAL DIRECTION: DICHOTOMY TO  
OVERLAPPING CONTINUA



every important question. The Liahona Saint, on the other hand, is preoccupied with questions and skeptical of answers; he finds in the gospel — as he understands it — answers to enough important questions so that he can function purposefully without answers to the rest (Poll 1983, 70).

It would be interesting to explore which answers elicit the Liahona's skepticism, as well as to identify which "answers to important questions" he or she finds essential. The key, though, to understanding the Liahona does not lie in a catalog of specific moral-religious controversies, but in what the Liahona would perceive as defects in the Iron Rod's epistemological resources. According to the Liahona, the Holy Spirit and Church leaders are not consistently reliable sources of truth nor infallible guides for moral agency. Poll's assessment of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit is revealing:

As a method of confirming truth, the witness of the Spirit demonstrably has *not* produced uniformity of Gospel interpretation even among Iron Rod Saints, and it is allegedly by the witness of that same Spirit — by the burning within — that many apostates pronounce the whole Church in error. As a method of influencing the course of events, it seems unpredictable and some of the miracles claimed for it seem almost whimsical. By the prayer of faith one man recovers his lost eyeglasses; in spite of such prayer, another man goes blind.

All of which leaves the Liahona Mormon with a somewhat tenuous connection with the Holy Spirit (1967, 111).

If traditional Church resources are unpredictable, where do Liahonas find their religious direction? The answer is, of course, in some combination of rational-empirical methods, exercised *within* the ongoing dynamic of Church tradition. It is important to remember that even though they may be preoccupied with the empirically verifiable, Liahona members are still committed to experiences that transcend the reasonable.

Prayer is an interesting example of the collision of the natural and the supernatural in the Liahona worldview. Poll writes:

Prayer is rarely for miracles, or even for new answers. It is — or ought to be — an intensely personal exercise in sorting out and weighing the relevant factors in our problems, and looking to God as we consider the alternative solutions. (Many of our problems would solve themselves if we would consider only options on which we could honestly ask God's benediction.) (1967, 115)

At times this attitude may seem to deny fundamental religious experience. "What is seen as a miracle by the Iron Rod Saints," comments Richard Poll, "my type tends to interpret as coincidence, or psychosomatic manifestation, or [an] inaccurately remembered or reported event" (1967, 114). An Iron Rod Saint might wonder what a Liahona member finds attractive in a church built on a tradition of God's miraculous interventions in the lives of his people, as a church and as individuals, from crickets and seagulls to healings and patriarchal blessings.

The Liahona members are, however, deeply committed to their church, and this commitment directly relates to their rational-empirical approach to religious experience. That approach is rooted in the Mormon principle of eternal progression, that men and women can become as God. The apparent meaninglessness of life does have an answer, and "the answer is grandly challenging. It lies in three revealed propositions: (1) Man is eternal. (2) Man is free. (3) God's work and glory is to exalt this eternal free agent — man" (Poll 1967, 114).

The uniquely Mormon scriptures, "The glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36) and "If a person gains more knowledge in this life, he will have an advantage in the world to come" (D&C 130:19), crystallize the Liahona worldview. Here we have God's children encountering life in all its manifold and challenging complexity, the Lord allowing them to learn by experience, intervening in their affairs only when absolutely necessary. By thinking through moral alternatives and building on experience, men and women gain the spiritual knowledge and skills that allow them to progress step by step towards the character of their heavenly parents. Thus minimal intervention as well as a plentitude of unresolved questions might be considered essential to spiritual growth. As Poll stated, "He has left things pretty much up to me — a free agent, a god in embryo, who must learn by experience as well as direction how to be like God" (1967, 115).

### *The Institutional Church*

I have modified Richard Poll's Iron Rod category to include only those whose spiritual lives center on the institutional Church. According to Poll's characterization, the religious lives of these unreconstructed Iron Rods are not particularly complex. They find answers to the mysteries of life in two extra-scriptural injunctions: "Follow the Brethren" and "Obedience is the first law of heaven." For this kind of Saint, the most important prophet is the prophet we now have.

This allegiance to the gospel and Church generates both personal and institutional strength. Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* and the *General Handbook of Instructions* provide not only instruction but an enabling security and self-assurance that leads to unequivocal church-directed action, from asking golden questions to sand-bagging river banks — though as every bishop knows, it's not quite enough to ensure that "the home teaching gets done."

With answers in the *Ensign* and the demands of planning the ward Christmas party, the kinds of introspective struggles that preoccupy the Liahona rarely rise to the issue stage for the Church-centered member. "For in an activity-centered Church it is quite possible to be deeply and satisfyingly involved without looking seriously at the philosophical implications of some Gospel propositions which are professed" (Poll 1967, 112).<sup>1</sup>

### *Personal Inspiration (the Charismatics)*

I would prefer a Mormon symbol consistent with Iron Rod and Liahona to denominate the Charismatic type, but I have not as yet come up with an equally felicitous label. I have elected to use the respectable "charismatic" (personal) as a contrast to the "priestly" (Iron Rod) or Liahona approaches to the gospel. Regardless of the unhallowed label, let me emphasize that the Charismatics are also faithful members of the Church who sustain their leaders. Devotion to the Church, however, does not inhibit them from seeking unmediated spiritual direction, which is their defining characteristic. The Charismatics are, then, those who rely on the Holy Spirit as their primary source of guidance. Liahonas easily mistake them for Iron Rods. These Saints, however, share a common experience with the Liahonas: inevitable ambiguity stalks both Liahona and Charismatic quests for truth and light, though Charismatics quietly endure uncertainty rather than systematically engaging doubt.

The Charismatics' personal and church experiences confirm Paul's observation that "now we see through a glass, darkly . . . now [we] know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). Thus Church programs and policies change and the messages of the Spirit are not always patently decipherable. Length of missionary service changes from twenty-four months to eighteen, then back to twenty-four, and Young Men's and Young Women's activity night is once a week, then twice a month, before coming back to once a week. The Spirit whispers all is well, but a dear friend dies.

Although the Charismatics accept the divine injunction to "study it [an issue] out in [your] mind" (D&C 9:8), they part company with the Liahonas on the ultimate efficacy of rational discourse and empirical verification. The Charismatics are struck by the inevitable contradictions and endemic revisionism of the scholarly enterprise, rather than drawn to its challenges. In pur-

<sup>1</sup> Though Poll struggles valiantly to give equal legitimacy to both Iron Rod and Liahona points of view, his condescension toward the Iron Rods is underclothing that shows throughout his essay: if the Iron Rods would only think, they would be Liahonas! One of his correspondents describes Poll's elitism this way: "'Liahonas see themselves as somehow *outside* the pale; over there are the plodders, the iron rodders, clinging blindly to pull themselves through the fog, while over here are we Liahonas, basking in the light of superior knowledge'" (Poll 1983, 72).

suit of truth, they turn instead to cultivating a sense of God in their lives. They seek the presence of the divine, which also sustains and comforts as it “enlightens your mind” (D&C 11:13).

Free agency is at the heart of both the Liahona and the Charismatic’s less-than-direct course toward truth and light, but the Charismatics are much nearer to the Iron Rods on the issue of the place of God in our everyday lives. Poll characterizes the Liahona view in the following manner:

To me, this prerequisite for exaltation [free agency] explains the apparent remoteness of God from many aspects of the human predicament — my predicament. My range of freedom is left large, and arbitrary divine interference with that freedom is kept minimal, in order that I may grow. Were God’s hand always upon my shoulder, or his Iron Rod always in my grasp, my range of free choice would be constricted, and my growth as well (1967, 114).

The Charismatics are no less committed to our fundamental need for agency, but at the same time they see no inherent contradiction between agency and God’s intimate involvement both in the trivial and profound aspects of our lives. The Lord hears each prayer, and then permits or prohibits natural consequences and occurrences. Despite apparent accident, disease, and outright evil, the Charismatic believes that the sum total of the free agent acts that precipitate tragedy are carefully monitored and ultimately bounded. There are reasons; there is a purpose. Indeed, for the Charismatics, as in the hymn’s refrain, “his eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me” (cf. Luke 12:6–7). Our Heavenly Father is not remote and uninvolved in our lives.

Many Charismatics are likely to find spiritual guidance through a personal relationship with Christ. They seek in the person of Jesus a friend who stands near to sustain them. For them he is truly the “living water” (John 4:9–15), the “bread of life” (John 6:35), and the “true vine” (John 15:1–5). Without him they “can do nothing” (John 15:5). Dependent on the person of Christ, they endeavor to follow his injunction: “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful” (D&C 6:36–37).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Charismatics usually blend in with their Iron Rod brothers and sisters, their only peculiarity being that they are a little on the “spiritual” side. But since they emphasize the importance of direct access to the Savior, it is only natural that from time to time the Iron Rod guardians of Church ritual might regard them as a threat to the correlation of Church spirituality. An intriguing point of conflict occurred when Elder Bruce R. McConkie at a Brigham Young University devotional denounced the work of a popular Christ-centered BYU instructor (Pace 1981). Elder McConkie’s address later became Lesson 7 of the 1984 Melchizedek priesthood personal study guide, *Come Unto Christ*. But there are evidently General Authorities with Charismatic sympathies. A subsequent address by Elder Neal A. Maxwell which became Lesson 7 of the 1987 Relief Society course of study, *Learn of Me*, took poignant exception with Elder McConkie’s point of view, though in the marvelously harmonious manner in which many of the General Authorities handle their public differences: there was no mention of names or an explicit counter-position. Then the 1988 reincarnation of the 1984 Melchizedek priesthood personal study guide, bearing the same name, contained an extensive rewrite of Elder McConkie’s 1984 lesson, the only lesson in the manual with substantive revisions.

While there are certainly Church leaders with Charismatic sympathies, the Charismatics are more often found among Church teachers (professional as well as lay). Perhaps the

While Charismatic energy currently centers on the worship of Christ, these impulses were more widely diffused in nineteenth-century Mormonism. Speaking in tongues, personal prophecies for friends and families, and Relief Society washings, anointings, and healings were still Church institutions at the turn of the century (Alexander 1986, 272–306; Newell 1987). Scientific rationalism and a drive for organizational (priesthood) definition of members' spirituality in the early twentieth century led to a disappearance or a redefinition of these spiritual gifts by mid-century. The underlying religious inclinations, however, were not contained; they have reappeared in a more exclusive form: the quest for a relationship with Christ as personal savior.<sup>3</sup>

But even with faith centered firmly on Christ, contemporary Charismatics still face the same general dilemma as their fellow Liahona members. Both struggle to find their way through darkness toward light: Charismatics seek the light of Christ for the sake of his peace, and Liahonas search for the light of eternal principles to make them one with God. Their Iron Rod brothers and sisters travel less falteringly through life following paths clearly marked by the institutional Church.

The place of the scriptures as sources of religious direction provides further insight into the character of these three types. The Iron Rods are more likely to see the scriptures as a kind of handbook, the "Topical Guide" taking on definitive status, guiding and directing the reader from one gospel principle to another. Liahonas are much more selective; they contextualize patterns of behavior and theological propositions in the historical moment, sifting through allegories and parables to find general principles worth practicing. Charismatics, by contrast, use the scriptures as a medium through which they receive revelation and a personal knowledge of their Savior, after pondering and meditation.

Perhaps these three views on the role of God in our lives should be seen more as matters of temperament than of propositional validity. The Charismatic character structure is one of essential dependency — dependency, in this context, on the spirit of God for direction and sustenance. While Charismatics may be talented and accomplished, they are likely to feel that personal achievement emanates from the grace of God. Iron Rods also possess dependency

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organizational demands of Church administration overwhelm the incumbents of leadership positions, precluding the meditation and communion requisite to Charismatic spirituality. It is also possible that women, institutionally excluded from most demanding leadership positions, find alternative fulfillment in a Charismatic approach to the gospel.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to emphasize that even the Christ-centered Charismatic point of view has important variations, as the overlapping continua characterizing personal direction in Figure 1 attempt to represent. O. Kendall White, for example, sees in Charismatic Mormonism, which he labels Mormon "neo-orthodoxy," a strong reflection of the right-wing political concerns of Christian fundamentalism. The initial subjects of White's analysis were a number of Brigham Young University religious instructors actively teaching and lecturing in the 1960s. White (1987, 139–57) does, however, note a renaissance of sorts in Charismatic thinking in the 1980s, represented in the work of Margaret Toscano (1988) and Paul Toscano (1988), among others. While White does not attempt to place a political label on these thinkers, there is an evident cultural and academic, if not political, shift in this recent body of thought.



character traits, but in this case the foci of the emotional investment are clear and definable Church programs and personalities. In contrast, the relatively independent Liahonas draw on their own powers of reason and observation as they navigate their way, with the institutional Church providing a porous umbrella, through the storms and sunshine of mortal probation.

SOCIAL CLASS LOCATION/SOCIAL FORMATION

Although Richard Poll’s essay is not a political treatise, it clearly has political implications. Since the Iron Rod identifies so closely with the predominantly conservative Church, Iron Rods, following the brethren, are likely to be politically conservative as well. On the other hand, the relatively liberated thinking of Liahonas may lead them towards more liberal politics — civil rights two decades ago and ERA in the eighties. This probable confluence of the political and spiritual is diagrammed in Figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2

STEREOTYPICAL RELIGIOUS/POLITICAL POSITIONS

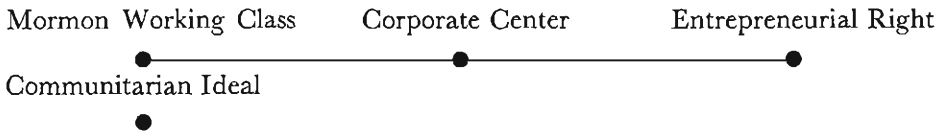
		Political Position	
		Liberal	Conservative
Sources of Personal Direction	Reason/Experience	Liahona	
	Institutional Church		Iron Rod

While these superficial and somewhat stereotypical categories of Mormon political ideology often capture media attention, they are far less critical than the “deep structures” of social class position. I contend, in fact, that one’s class location rather than one’s political position reflects fundamental social and economic interests, shaping and molding religious obligations from fast offering donations to prayers for the oppressed.

I have mapped the landscape of class in the Church using two criteria: (1) the class distinctions need to be simple yet inclusive and (2) the distinctions should reflect Mormon political culture. Employing these criteria, I have located three structurally identifiable classes and envision a fourth alternative society or “social formation.” This embryonic social formation suggests itself as a viable option to the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in the relations among the first three classes. The three broad structural classes are the Entrepreneurial Right, the Corporate Center, and a Mormon Working Class. The alternative social formation is the Communitarian Ideal.



FIGURE 3  
STRUCTURE OF MORMON POLITICAL CULTURE



Note in Figure 3 above that the Entrepreneurial Right, Corporate Center, and Mormon Working Class are placed on the same continuum while the Communitarian Ideal occupies a separate space. I argue that the Right and Center, as well as the Mormon Working Class with a decidedly underdeveloped class consciousness, share many fundamental assumptions about relationships with their fellow men and women, though matters of style and specific positions on particular issues vary. The Communitarian Ideal should be conceptualized as categorically distinct, a type of society just as different from capitalism as capitalism is from feudalism or socialism.

#### OVERVIEW OF MORMON CLASS RELATIONS

I have based my work on neo-classical class analysis, in particular, the work of Erik Olin Wright (1985). Wright constructs a typology of twelve class locations from three critical variables: (1) ownership of capital versus dependency on wage labor, (2) possession of organizational assets (being actively involved in policy decisions with real authority over subordinates), and (3) possession of skill and credential assets (a university degree).

##### *Capitalist Classes*

For the purposes of this essay the Corporate Center consists of (1) the capitalist class (under 2 percent of the population), joined by (2) a diverse group of wage-earning managers, experts, and supervisors, who make up another 35 to 45 percent of the class hierarchy. While most of this second group (managers, experts, and supervisors, working in both the private and the public sectors) do not as a rule own significant amounts of capital, they do control the critical institutions of advanced capitalism through two key possessions: (1) their organizational positions, which they claim through (2) credential and skill assets. With this New Property (Reich 1964), the professionals and managers of the Corporate Center constitute a New Class (Gouldner 1979) that plays a pivotal role in the class relations of the last decades of the twentieth century.

Owners of capital, however, are not synonymous with the Corporate Center, but may be subdivided into three distinct classes: (1) the capitalist class (those 2 percent in the Corporate Center who own sufficient capital to hire workers and not work); (2) small employers (those who own sufficient capital to hire workers — usually about ten employees or less — but must work); and

(3) the self-employed (those who own sufficient capital to work for themselves but without the resources to hire more than another worker or two). Only the first, the capitalist class proper, is part of the Corporate Center. I have collapsed the last two categories into the Entrepreneurial Right, made up then of small business people who are either self-employed (an independent real estate salesperson, for example) or who have a small number of employees (a building contractor or a crafts manufacturer, for example).

The Entrepreneurial Right constitutes only 10 to 15 percent of the labor force but has a very important place in Mormon folk life. On the surface, their occupations represent initiative, freedom, and self-reliance — quintessential pioneer values. Nevertheless, the Entrepreneurial Right must buy, sell, and trade in a socio-economic world dominated by the Corporate Center. These irksome dependency relationships often produce tension and frustration, but not enough to inhibit the Entrepreneurs' alliance with the Corporate Center against the interests of the working class. Consequently, even though some small business people may be politically "liberal," as a group their fundamental interests and their structural position in the political economy are on the "right."

### *Mormon Working Class*

The working class, as the subordinate class, is composed of wage laborers without organizational or credential assets. This group of formally supervised and nonautonomous laborers constitute the remaining 35 to 45 percent of the work force. While many from the working class enjoy the considerable benefits of a consumer culture, they are nevertheless without socially valuable property: their structural positions leave them *organizationally* propertyless and thus powerless.<sup>4</sup>

As a cursory examination of the occupational backgrounds of stake presidencies, mission presidents, and regional representatives in the *Church News*

<sup>4</sup> Erik Olin Wright's work, which informs this conceptual mapping of Mormon class relations, is empirical as well as theoretical. Using attitude indexes, questions on organizational position, credentials, skill, etc., Wright operationalized his class criteria for a national survey conducted by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. The 1487 households in the survey are broken down here in percentages based on Wright's twelve class locations: (1) capitalist class (1.8 percent), (2) small employers (6.0 percent), (3) self-employed (6.9 percent), (4) expert managers (3.9 percent), (5) expert supervisors (3.7 percent), (6) expert non-managers (3.4 percent), (7) semi-credentialed managers (6.2 percent), (8) semi-credentialed supervisors (6.8 percent), (9) semi-credentialed workers (12.2 percent), (10) uncredentialed managers (2.3 percent), (11) uncredentialed supervisors (6.9 percent), and (12) working class (39.9 percent) (1985, 195).

An additional theoretical matter needs attention. Wright's class map is not primarily concerned with inequality, though his data show a close correlation between class position and income (1985, 232–37). My concern is the relationships among classes. Inequality (in income as in opportunity for self-actualization) result from dominant classes appropriating surplus from a subordinate class, i.e., consuming more than they produce. The poor are poor because the rich are rich — and the affluent comfortable. John Roemer (1982) works out in detail the nature of these exploitive relationships.

My analysis of the Corporate Center was also influenced by Randall Collins (1979); for the reader interested in my own work on the theoretical and empirical bases of inequality, see Jacob 1981.

confirms, middle-level Church leaders come from the Corporate Center, and to a lesser extent from the Entrepreneurial Right. Because the behavior and attitudes of these key decision-makers as members of identifiable classes are the primary subject of the social character analysis that follows, I will not examine further the Mormon Working Class nor include it as a category in my typology of social character. The practical constraints of the essay's organization should, though, in no way be interpreted as denying the strategic importance of workers in the Mormon future. The poor and the dispossessed joining the Church all over the world as a Rainbow Coalition (Davis 1986) could become one of the critical forces in encouraging the Church to examine its uncritical acceptance of the mandates and ideals of Corporate Center and the Entrepreneurial Right.

By including the Communitarian Ideal alongside the empirically available classes, I intend to make my analysis of Mormon class structure dynamic rather than static — a theory of history. The dilemmas, contradictions, and even crises of living in a society dominated by the Corporate Center, and the Entrepreneurial Right, are likely to prompt at least some Church members *and* leaders to search actively for solutions to their own and their brothers' and sisters' problems of underemployment, unemployment, a deteriorating physical environment, absence of quality health care, and insufficient resources to care for aging parents. Church members disturbed by the ethos of inequality and competition of the Entrepreneurial Right and the Corporate Center, especially as it affects their community worship, could very well find the antithesis of their predicaments in an idealized Mormon past, here conceptualized as the Communitarian Ideal — a society that attempts to revive the nineteenth-century experiments of living and working cooperatively together in a state of equality.

Since those Saints who are attracted to the Communitarian Ideal are unlikely to be presently living in any social arrangement that could be called communitarian, these members use the resources of their religion to transcend the immediate interests of their current class locations. A series of fundamental social crises might be a precondition, though, to provide the opening necessary for Church leaders to mobilize their fellow members toward new kinds of Church communities.

However, the shift could be more gradual. The Corporate Center, naturally, is not all of one piece. To varying degrees, factions of the Corporate Center, except for the capitalist class, are exploited as well as exploiters. Most of the Corporate Center can be seen, again by degrees, as working in contradictory class locations between the capitalist and working classes. Occupants of these contradictory locations, including many middle-level Church leaders, could very well look for alternative socio-economic solutions when the everyday dislocations of capitalism threaten their positions.

As Wright concludes, "Particularly under conditions where contradictory locations are being subjected to a process of 'degradation' — deskilling, proletarianization, routinization of authority, etc. — it may be quite possible for people in those contradictory locations which are clearly net-exploited to see the balance of their interests as being more in line with the working class than

with the capitalist class" (1985, 125–26; Gouldner 1979). Consequently, it may well be that segments of the Corporate Center, including influential Church leaders, will constitute the progressive class in the movement toward a more just social order, whether inside or outside of the Church.

To move now beyond this conceptual overview and towards the social character typology central to the essay, I want to examine in detail in the following two sections the class aggregates, the Entrepreneurial Right and the Corporate Center, which define the ethos of the contemporary Church.

### *The Entrepreneurial Right*

An entrepreneurial spirit permeates contemporary Mormonism. Brigham Young University professors make and sell paperweights and keychains memorializing a championship football team; engineers' spouses have their Amway clientele; and "everybody" has been approached by "somebody" with an investment enterprise calculated to bring fortunate investors algebraic if not geometric returns.

The essence of the Entrepreneurial Right's worldview is an idealized direct relationship between work and success. Individual failure, if and when it comes, results from moral deficiencies: lack of persistence and/or inability to defer gratification. Opportunities abound, and we may, if we will, take advantage of them. In the entrepreneurs' opinion, the poor are the victims of their own ineptitude, just as affluence is secured by ingenuity and diligence. Since one's status is earned, not a product of chance or inherited advantage, no one is under moral obligation to share surplus beyond perfunctory charity. There is "no free lunch," and little exasperates the Entrepreneurs more profoundly than the possibility that someone might enjoy a measure of material reward, e.g., welfare, without effort comparable to their own.

The Entrepreneurial Right's moral certitude masks the inherent precariousness of their status. They possess few guarantees. The entrepreneurs must rise early tomorrow, and all the mornings thereafter, to maintain and marginally advance their relative advantage. It is only natural, then, that they react, with a collective reflex, towards perceived threats to their tenuous accumulation.

An overriding concern to many on the Right are alterations in a free market that otherwise allows them to translate their skills and hard work to affluence. The usual source of threatening changes in the benign marketplace springs from the cartel character of corporate capitalism itself, accompanied by its meddlesome regulatory agencies born of the partnership of big business and big government.

A certain segment of the Church's Entrepreneurial Right actively opposes the erosion of a free market and is likely to articulate and propagate anti-establishment sentiments. Carried to their logical conclusion, their frustrations evolve into a full-blown populism that is revolutionary in character. This politics of extremism has produced its own literature (Skousen 1970; cf. Brinkerhoff, Jacob, and Mackie 1987) and mobilized true believers through formal organization (e.g., the Center for Constitutional Studies, formerly the Free-

men Institute). The agenda of this ultraright faction is not dissimilar from that of the far left: to dismantle the base of transnational capital and return "power to the people" — to earn without interference if not to establish social justice and equity.

While some theorists regard the Mormon right as all of one piece (Shupe and Heinerman 1985), in actual practice most entrepreneurial Mormons gravitate toward a much more moderate brand of conservatism. They are preoccupied with a round of church, work, and family life that leaves little room for political activism. Furthermore, Church members receive little, if any, direct encouragement from the official Church to attend to other than their ecclesiastical and domestic obligations.

Beyond this practical division in the Entrepreneurial Right, disparities of wealth also prevail among those with similar fundamental class interests. The owner of a fabric store in a shopping mall, clinging to middle-class respectability, may feel no discomfort being hometaught by a building contractor and developer whose tithes and offerings approach his shopkeeper brother's net income.

Such unity in the face of deep material divisions brings us to another anomaly in the Entrepreneurial Right's worldview. While poverty is thought to have moral roots, business failure is seen as systemic, the marketplace made imperfect. Thus the entrepreneur expects individual remediation to be the cure for underemployment, yet he calls for structural renewal to remedy circumstances that now enchain the entrepreneurs' energy and inventiveness.

### *The Corporate Center*

Diverse political expressions mask the deep similarity of socio-economic interests among Latter-day Saints who work for corporations, universities, schools, and government. Liberal policies versus conservative programs are little more than epiphenomenal when compared with the Corporate Center's common drive to preserve and enhance its hegemony. The Corporate Center's hegemony is rooted in the enmeshed nature of large-scale organizations. They are powerful socio-economic actors who command large and stable clienteles for their services and goods, from master of fine arts degrees to chocolate chip cookies.

The essential benefit of membership in the corporate community is less remuneration than security. Employment in the corporate establishment often brings with it a kind of sinecure, a guarantee of income with a less-than-tight correspondence to performance.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Warner P. Woodworth, in an article that parallels this one both in general tone and in the specific characterization of the Corporate Center, provides a necessary corrective to the picture of corporate security. He graphically describes the underside of sinecure: competition in the struggle for the executive suite leaves in its wake anxiety, depression, and broken health (1987, 30).

The term "large-scale organizations," used to characterize the Corporate Center, also needs to be qualified. In Wright's 1985 survey, just over one-quarter of the managers and just under one-fifth of the supervisors worked in private firms with fewer than fifty employees. Wright concluded from these data that "this may be the era of monopoly capital,

The organizational largess of the Corporate Center goes beyond secure income. Corporate life provides personal and family benefits rarely reflected in tithing: training courses, travel, and familiarity with the cutting edge of technology from telecommunications to desk-top publishing, not to mention perquisites such as generous per diems, "frequent flier" bonuses, and company cars.

Though one place in the economy is inherently precarious and the other a comfortable niche, Mormons of the Entrepreneurial Right and the Corporate Center are still likely to share a similar diagnosis for the social and economic marginality of the underclass: moral failure. But whereas the Entrepreneurial Right prescribes an isolated and individual moral renovation, spurred by removal of the social safety net, the Corporate Center remedies poverty by extending the net through the very organizations they represent. The poor become clients of school teachers, nurses, and social workers, moving through corporate therapy toward responsible citizenship. As it became evident during the Great Society projects, "Poverty's where the money's at!"

Undoubtedly many kind and skilled Latter-day Saint professionals are honestly trying to reach out to the less fortunate, but they do it in their own way, the Corporate Center's way. The Corporate Center's way is to provide opportunity, equal opportunity, through its institutions and its proffered therapy, to assist and encourage the poor to lift themselves up and out of poverty and to, theoretically, whatever level of the social order their performance might merit.

While the Corporate Center's paternalism may be the prevailing, though not unchallenged, answer to poverty, the scriptures suggest otherwise: "I the Lord have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that *the rich be made low*" (D&C 104:16, emphasis added). Neither the Corporate Center nor, for that matter, the Entrepreneurial Right would be inclined towards the hierarchical transformation demanded by this scripture. Nevertheless, despite the imputed progressivism of liberal Mormons in the Corporate Center, currently it is the Entrepreneurial Right that represents fundamental populism and seeks the more radical revision in the structure of power and influence in the social order.<sup>6</sup>

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but this does not imply that monopoly corporations *directly* organize most wage-labour" (p. 208, emphasis added). Large-scale, then, does not apply so much to individual firms as to a web of (large-scale) corporate interrelations that define the ethos of late capitalism, including sub-contracting, holding companies, plus government contracts, subsidies, and oversight.

<sup>6</sup> A perceptive letter written to *DIALOGUE* over a decade and a half ago cuts to the heart of the contradictions in Mormon political liberalism. The letter's context was critical of reviews by Mormon liberals of W. Cleon Skousen's *The Naked Capitalist*:

Dear, Are you asleep?

Not quite.

Did you read the Round Table Review in this last *DIALOGUE*?

No.

They're reviewing Cleon Skousen's book, *The Naked Capitalist*.

You mean *The Naked Communist*.

No, the *Naked Capitalist* C-A-P-I-T-A-L-I-S-T.

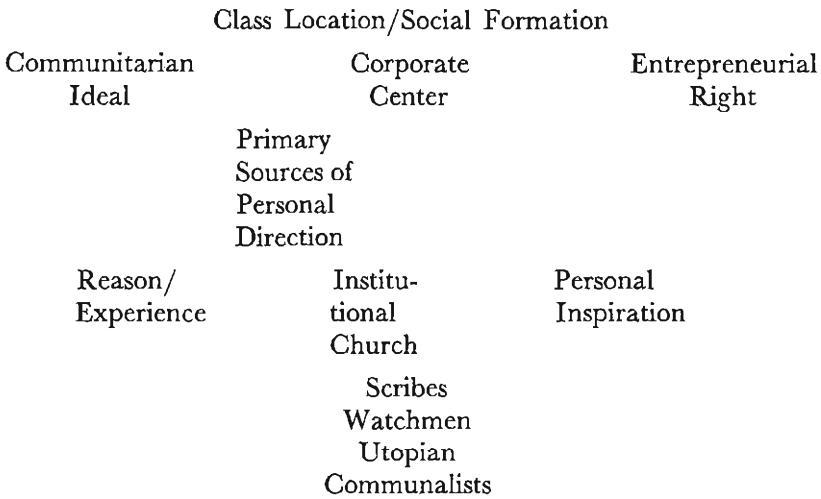
It's Communist, C-O-M-M-U-N-I-S-T. He wrote that book a long time ago.

THE SOCIAL CHARACTER TYPOLOGY

We can now add dimension to this Mormon social character construction. In Figure 4 we have the two continua placed at right angles to each other to

FIGURE 4

A TYPOLOGY OF MORMON SOCIAL CHARACTER



No, it's a new book called *The Naked Capitalist*. He says there's a conspiracy by the rich banker types to control the world.

You must have things mixed up. Our Cleon Skousen wouldn't write a book with that thesis or title. That's like Lowell Bennion suggesting that sweet reasonableness is a vice. It just wouldn't happen.

Well, Skousen wrote it and Midgley's reviewing it.

I suppose you'll tell me that Midgley came out for the rich guys.

Yes, that's exactly what he did. How did you guess? He supported the rich people and the status quo.

Look, dear, it's getting late. Perhaps we can talk about this in the morning. Midgley is an old U. of U. debater, a confirmed liberal. Liberals want to wrench the power from the rich and give it to the poor and powerless.

That's Skousen's program. According to Midgley, Skousen wants to: (1) angrily arouse people to the point where they will seize control of a political party, (2) take over the government, (3) use its power to eliminate the wealthy, (4) dismantle credit and money power, and (5) disperse POWER TO THE PEOPLE.

That's Skousen's program? Our Skousen, the arch crime fighter, super American, darling of the John Birch Society, former FBI agent? That's the program of a radical populist left winger type, but not Cleon Skousen. There aren't twenty-five active LDSers in the whole church, who are that radical.

Well, there are now. According to Midgley there's a flock of true believers following Skousen at the B.Y.U. and Midgley calls them right wingers not left wingers.

Let me get this straight. Skousen's a populist, his followers are right wing conservatives who are pursuing a radical left program and Midgley, the liberal, is defending the capitalist system and the rich guys.

Yes, that's pretty close.

The end must be near, do we have our two-year supply of food?

You're avoiding the issue. Whom do you choose?

What are my choices?

Skousen and the poor people or Midgley and the rich guys.

I'll take Midgley and the poor people.

Chicken (Shirts 1972, 4).



produce a typology of at least nine “ideal-typical” Mormons. It would be intriguing to try to sketch the contours and the nuances of each category, but such a task is beyond the central purpose of this essay. My intent is to describe and analyze the social-spiritual dynamics of contemporary Mormonism. To achieve that end with some parsimony, I will deal with only three cells from the typology: the Scribes, Watchmen, and Utopian Communalists. I begin the discussion with two recognizable Liahona and Iron Rod derivatives, Scribes and Watchmen, and then characterize the Utopian Communalists in a separate section.

Before we examine the Scribe and Watchman points of view, note that my project is sociological analysis and as such diverges sharply from Poll’s perspective. His Iron Rods and Liahonas were isolated moral agents, driven by the demands of their own psychologies — the need for certainty or the impulse to explore. In contrast, my Scribes and Watchmen are much more products of their social environments, shaped, molded, and even “trapped” by the web of social relations of which they are a part.

This apparent sociological determinism conflicts with traditional Mormon notions of individual agency. Yet, aside from the presumed threat of social constraint, the sociological approach is quite consistent with what faithful Latter-day Saints take for granted: the importance, even the necessity, of ecclesiastical organization (in this case the institutional Church) for the “perfecting of the Saints” (Eph. 4:12).

Social organizations provide support to members, enabling them to achieve both personal and organizational goals. Similarly, a larger web of social relations (class position in this analysis) exerts a coercive influence over individual actions and attitudes. In this case the push is towards system ends rather than individual or sub-group goals. And in terms of Mormon social character, the possibility exists that the deep structures of the larger social system have over time created inconsistencies, anomalies, and contradictions within what may have once been a much more autonomous, isolated, and unified worldview.

### *Scribes*

I use the label Scribe, here denoting the intersection of reason-experience and the Corporate Center, in its noblest sense: those who in the tradition of Ezra and Nehemiah labor to preserve and then enlarge upon a community’s core truths. The work of codification and elaboration was considered important enough to allocate productive surplus to ensure that the scribes might devote all their energies to their labors.

During the Hebrew monarchy, a scribe was a court official, and after Ezra the title referred to teachers of the law. For the purposes of this essay, the prototypical Scribe would be a university professor, a knowledge worker who enjoys a comfortable sinecure. Others in this class might be the custodians of knowledge in occupations such as accounting, law, medicine, information sciences, management, public school teaching, and graduate work.

Two obvious characteristics of Scribes are independence of mind and relative security of position. Their independent spirit places them in a paradoxical

relationship to the Church. As faithful Saints they wish to preserve and enhance their heritage (as, say, Mormon historians), but at the same time their inbred skepticism as knowledge workers places them on the margins of Mormon folk life — in the imagery of Plato's *The Republic*, they have "left the cave and know from whence come the shadows on the wall." The Scribes selectively embrace the noble they find in the Church without allowing themselves to be totally embraced by the Church.

Consequently, the Iron Rod types (the Watchmen of the Corporate Center) will fit much more comfortably into presiding positions, while, as one of Poll's correspondents observed, the Liahonas (Scribes) are called "to teach classes, be Boy Scout Leaders and do all kinds of things that require goodness and sensitivity, but not so much unquestioning obedience" (1983, 73). The Scribes are, then, typified by a more detached frame of mind that may often create a psychic aloofness placing them emotionally if not spatially outside Church ritual. Poll's approach to Sabbath observance reflects this attitude: "What is fitting, not what is conventional, becomes the question. On a lovely autumn evening I may even with quiet conscience, pass up an MIA fireside for a drive in the canyon. But the thankfulness for guidelines is nonetheless strong" (1967, 116).

The independent Scribes find it difficult to embrace, with other than intellectual curiosity, rituals or activities that require the surrender of the personal will to the will of the community. Rather, the Scribes find emotional and spiritual fulfillment in their relatively isolated pursuit of truth, as much in the Corporate Center's institutions, as in the Church itself. While the Entrepreneurial Right demands the freedom to earn, the Scribe struggles for the freedom to learn.

In their scribal role to "enlarge upon core truths," Scribes are typically advocates for change in Church policies, as seen in the controversies surrounding evolution, blacks and the priesthood, the place of women and ERA, and any number of other issues from a litany of fashionable concerns. The Scribes want change in the Church that would make it more modern and progressive, more in harmony with the mainstream of the Corporate Center. One might well wonder the fate of the Church if the Scribes were to move from Boy Scout leaders to Regional Representatives. Would the Church in becoming ever more adaptable find its evolutionary assimilation into the Middle America mainstream all the more accelerated?

In addition to the Scribes' struggle for the freedom to pursue truth, a second defining characteristic is the security of position Scribes enjoy in the Corporate Center's central institutions. This security and its resultant comfort often lead to an uncritical acceptance of the Corporate Center. While generally taking a meliorative stance on issues of social justice, the Scribes are reactionaries over proposals for fundamentally altering the status quo. Their conservatism is prudent, since altering inequality in contemporary America would place their privilege in jeopardy. But rarely are Scribes actively reactionary; rather they are merely oblivious to the possibility that their very lifestyles contribute to the sorrow and suffering of both their fellow Church mem-

bers and a good part of the rest of the world. In short, they fail to question the material and spiritual bases of their day-to-day lives.

A recent article by Garth Jones provides an example of this blindness. Jones calls on the Church to "do more" materially as well as spiritually, in order to fulfill its international mission. While a well-intentioned plea for the Church to dramatically expand charitable relief similar to the collective day of fast for the African famine in early 1985, the article's analysis does not advance beyond a familiar refrain: the authoritarianism and ethnocentrism of the Church incapacitate it for progressive social action (1987, 66). Because the author treats the Church as an isolated institution, he fails to regard as problematic the *entire* system of which the Church is an integral part.

It seems indecent to object to the Church expanding its humanitarian mission. But how aware are we of the nature and functioning of the very system that makes charity necessary and that benefits the affluent in the process? Scribes are reluctant to entertain this kind of question, much less to seek its answers.

One answer to questions on the fundamental causes of hunger and misery could start with a string of interrelated (systemic) connections. Americans eat fast food hamburgers from Central American beef whose cost is half as much as U.S. meat. Large tracts of Central American rain forests are cut to provide grazing land for the cattle destined for hamburgers. The shrinking rain forests provide winter habitat for ever decreasing numbers of North American birds. Fewer birds returning north for the spring means the elimination of a natural and safe method of insect control, resulting in a greater reliance on pesticides. Pesticide contamination of ground water now poses a major health hazard for American farmers, not to mention the pesticide residues with which supermarket shoppers cope.

Degradation of the environment also works its way from North to South. The United States farm debt stands at one-third that of the trillion dollar Third World debt — some of the Third World debt is incurred to finance the clearcutting of the Central American rain forests. Insurance companies buy farmland at foreclosure prices as an investment and then hire bankrupted farmers to manage their investments, burning and bulldozing the farmhouses, barns, and silos to lower property taxes. Much of the grain these new mega-farms grow (supported by the \$25.3 billion government farm subsidy programs) competes with locally grown grains in the underdeveloped South, adding to its debt. Mexico supplies half of the United States' winter vegetables on land that could easily make the country self-sufficient in corn and beans. The winter vegetables are sprayed with pesticides and herbicides banned in the United States, and hundreds of low-paid Mexican farm laborers die each year from chemical toxicity.

Laying bare the relentless movement of transnational capital and its consequences in the world system can be transfixing. But I will stop at this point, leaving a brief bibliographic overview. Lloyd Timberlake (1986) argues that a major contributor to desertification in the African Sahel (one of Jones's concerns) has been the cash crop plantation farming of cotton and peanuts. Samir

Amin et al. (1982) outline the structure and functioning of the world system that creates regions of underdevelopment, and Mike Davis (1986) accounts for absence of a working class resistance movement to this system in the United States. Norman Myers (1986) places the world system in an environmental and ecological context, and Steven Sanderson (1986), Steven Bunker (1985), and Mark Kramer (1987) treat specific manifestations of the world capitalist system in Mexican, Brazilian, and U.S. agriculture respectively.

The natural questions to ask next are what allows this kind of system to persist, and how are Mormons of the Corporate Center, and all the rest of us, implicated? The easy, as well as correct, answer is greed. But in the world of the Corporate Center greed becomes depersonalized, and partly sanitized, as "responsibility to shareholders" or the "protection of a budget line." Investment managers for mutual funds who buy the junk bonds of corporate mergers do not consider themselves responsible for the inevitable unemployment and family dislocations caused by the resulting company realignment. Oblivious to their collective impact and the personal morality of sustaining a destructive social order, the Scribes and Watchmen, residing in the security of the Corporate Center, are relatively insulated from the socially disruptive flows of profit-seeking international capital. The demands of transnational capital may transport factory jobs to Haiti and broccoli-growing to Guatemala, while middle-class Mormons continue as ever driving their children to ballet lessons and Cub Scouts.

### *Watchmen*

Many observers define the character of the Church by the politics of the Entrepreneurial Right and the spirituality of the Iron Rods. Naturally, then, I would have liked to develop as one of my three ideal types the now labelless cell at the intersection of the institutional Church and the Entrepreneurial Right. Though this cell without a label is a legitimate, empirical, social type, its unnamed residents find themselves in an anomalous category, out of synch with the historical moment. They are freedom-loving, small business people who owe their allegiance to a church with all the organizational trappings of an institution of the Corporate Center: a dedicated bureaucracy, cadres of experts, considerable financial resources, and an aura of permanence and stability. Consequently, the cautious outlook of a Church lawyer who patiently works day-to-day with counterparts in the Internal Revenue Service may well collide with the perspective of a real estate developer chronically frustrated by zoning regulations.

The entrepreneurial mentality that is critical in understanding the dynamics of Mormon folk life has little permanent office space at Church headquarters. It is true that entrepreneurs with managerial charisma are called to general presiding positions, but it is more likely that the demands of the organization will shape and mold their style, rather than the other way around.

The Watchmen, whose primary source of personal direction comes from the institutional Church and whose training and outlook are inherited from the Corporate Center, are the ones who guard the traditions and mission of

the Church. From the towers of the Church, they mobilize the ranks within and guard against the enemy without. Their guardianship begins, interestingly, in moderating the influence of the Entrepreneurial Right, in terms of ideology as well as style.

Entrepreneurs with an articulated political agenda do try to mobilize Church support for a variety of moral-political causes. What is remarkable is how rarely the Church directly involves itself with issues like ERA. A strong countervailing religious pragmatism limits the Church's social activism (Brinkerhoff, Jacob, and Mackie 1987, 242-47). Those Iron Rod Entrepreneurs who "follow the Brethren" will be increasingly frustrated by a lack of reciprocal sensitivity to their political concerns.

Administrative style is another issue over which the Iron Rod Watchmen and the Entrepreneurs, whether Liahona or Iron Rod, are likely to collide, however gently. The creative instincts of the Entrepreneurs and their highly valued personal initiative clash with leadership by handbook and strict adherence to correlation imperatives. Of course, centralized coordination gives the correlated Church great organizational strength, but the Entrepreneurs and the Scribes may at times take positions toward the Church similar to the Spanish Conquistadores' toward the Crown: "*Obedezco pero no cumpro*" (I obey, but I do not comply). Nevertheless, the Church has successfully unified its membership, and sacrament meetings in Santiago, Chile, are strikingly similar to those held in Rexburg, Idaho. The massive power of the Church to take concerted action is thus a fundamental reality, even if it commonly limits itself to nothing more remarkable than being the world's single largest buyer of pianos.

Scribes present a different kind of problem to the Watchmen. They wish to scrutinize Church traditions in the interest of truth, a project Watchmen feel does little to further the cause of Zion. While the Scribes claim that knowing the unvarnished struggles of now sainted forbearers would animate members who are depressed by the gulf between Church demands and personal performance, the Watchmen fear that such unfaithful history could demoralize the Lord's army at just the hour in the nightwatch when the enemy is ready to mount its most vicious attack.

This very attack from without, though, shifts the Watchmen's energies from consternation with the Scribe mentality or the idiosyncracies of Entrepreneurs to protecting Church members from the evils of contemporary immorality. The Watchmen's mission of protecting the Church from outside evil is a frustratingly complex and ambiguous one. In fact, the watchman metaphor itself dissolves in the face of reality. The Church is not a walled city; rather its members and the Church itself dwell, as C. S. Lewis points out, in "enemy occupied territory — that is what the world is" (1977, 44).

To appreciate fully the dilemmas with which the Watchmen struggle, we need to ask a series of interrelated questions about the nature of the Corporate Center the Watchmen accept and the tide of immorality they categorically reject. To begin with: Is there a connection between personal immorality and the regulated marketplace of the Corporate Center? An answer starts with the

straightforward observation that in the world of the Corporate Center sex is not simply an area for transgression but a commodity to be bought and sold. The pandering and purchasing of sex, from situation comedies to new wave rock to hard-core pornography, is a multi-billion-dollar-a-year industry unique to corporate capitalism. Institutionalized violence against women becomes a matter of a commercial transaction, no different in form from the purchase of airline tickets or mutual funds. It becomes a matter of what the market will bear and what the state will allow. The question is whether the Watchmen can reject evil but embrace the system that distributes it and profits from it. Naturally the answer is equivocal. The Watchmen *are* men and women of high principle who battle valiantly against the forces of darkness. Their energies are focused. But selectivity is the heart of the problem. The Watchmen work, justly and compassionately, with the symptoms of immorality without taking into full account its sources.

Since the Watchmen are rarely sensitive to the social-structural roots of evil, they will seldom see that the very system they accept can create personalities vulnerable to the evil they hate. Which brings us to the second question: Is lack of self-esteem connected to the despair that finds solace in personal deviancy? A sense of inadequacy is deeply rooted in the market processes of the Corporate Center where self-esteem has become a comparative product: we can feel good about ourselves if our marketable characteristics (appearance and skill) and possessions are superior to others'. Yet such self-approval is all too perishable. There are always those with more of the accoutrements of status, and time and the vagaries of the marketplace tarnish appearance and leave skills obsolete. The end result is too often a vulnerable personality who assuages anxieties through spiraling levels of immorality.

The prophet Ezekiel apparently recognized the close connection between social inequities and immorality. Identifying the primary weaknesses of Sodom and Gomorrah, the prophet did not dwell on immorality but bluntly declared, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, *pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness* was in her and in her daughters, *neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy*. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good" (Ezek. 16: 49–50, emphasis added).

Ezekiel's statement attests to the universality of inequality as well as immorality. And while it has always been possible to live a life of personal purity in a society that trades on evil, one has to wonder whether a church that does not take full account of the social-structural roots of personal immorality will possess sufficient resources to deliver itself, and its members, from the anguish of collective transgression.

#### UTOPIAN SOCIAL CHARACTER

Given, then, the dilemmas that come from trying to "be in the world but not of the world" — strains and contradictions that faithful members constantly encounter as they try to reconcile their beliefs to overly familiar alien



values and practices — it is only reasonable to expect that some, whether Watchmen, Scribes, or Entrepreneurs, would begin to consider alternative social arrangements. I will now turn to one set of possible alternatives, beginning with the sentiments of the emergent Communitarian Idealists. Once I have established the outlines of this society in embryo, I can focus my attention on the Utopian Communalists, a union of the Charismatic source of personal direction and Communitarian Idealist vision of class relations.

### *The Communitarian Ideal*

To introduce the Communitarian Ideal point of view, I need to repeat that the Entrepreneurial Right, not the so-called progressive liberals of the Corporate Center, appear to have the revolutionary agenda. They see in the symbiotic relationship between big government and big business a conspiracy of global proportion, threatening the very foundation of a democratic society. They envision a new social order where all goods and services (bachelors degrees as well as corn flakes) compete for buyers in a free market, unfettered by cartels and monopolies. This brand of radical individualism places a primacy on personal freedom, to the end not only of uninhibited promulgation of the gospel, but also as a mechanism for releasing creative energies to pursue material advantage.

Thus throughout the Reagan years, the Corporate Center has been waging a war of defense (of conservation) against the Entrepreneurial Right's attempts to "downsize" the welfare state and eliminate sinecure. But as the battles ebb and flow, it has become evident that the Radical Right is not so much engaged in a revolution as a palace coup. The generals march through the revolving doors, but the furniture is merely rearranged. The rhetoric and the programs may vary from free enterprise to welfare state capitalism, but the substructure remains: societies deeply divided by wealth and privilege.

This noxious division in the Church as well as in society at large, is what most disturbs the Communitarian Idealists. Since the Communitarians are not presently an identifiable class in our society, they own no sociological real estate (theirs is more a state of mind than an address). They may labor for daily bread in any number of social locations — as employees, proprietors, caseworkers, or teachers, in either small businesses or corporate entities. Regardless of their actual location in status hierarchies, they are ill at ease. Their interpretation of Mormonism leaves them very uncomfortable with prevailing inequality and its ethic of competition. They envision an ideal society, drawn from their own historical roots, where "they had all things in common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (4 Ne. 1:3). Since this ideal would entail a fundamental reordering of society as we know it, it is the Communitarians who should wear the progressive labels.

The Communitarian malaise is not simply directed towards injustice in an impenetrable system but is more likely to focus on the community, even the ward, level. A Communitarian Saint finds it painful to live in a congregation where some children's imperfect teeth benefit from orthodontal care, while for



others such care is beyond luxury; where some couples rely on comfortable pensions to carry them through full-time missions, while others must maintain workplace rhythms.

Economic inequality, though, is only one cause of the Communitarians' discomfort. These idealists cherish the sense of community found in Church councils and committees and regard these experiences, though they often carry extensive responsibilities and commitments, as all too fleeting and fragmented. They long for the wholeness of a more embracing community, where brothers and sisters do not go their separate ways after Sunday meetings to compete for their individual and family fortunes in a hostile world. Only when they can place all their energies into cooperative ventures with their fellow Saints will these members find complete religious fulfillment. They long to take literally the scripture from our communitarian past: "In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld" (D&C 70:14).

Now the natural question is why would a group of Saints who have grown up in an unequal and competitive, but affluent, society question their advantages and opportunities? But I find more interesting the Communitarians' question: How can Church members, whether on the Entrepreneurial Right or in the Corporate Center, countenance the even minimal estrangement between brothers and sisters that inequality brings to a community of believers? Perhaps our sensibilities have been numbed by the Church's assimilation into America's culture of inequality where our self-esteem is so much a function of competitively locating ourselves in terms of the accoutrements of status in relation to others less well-off, gifted, or accomplished. An additional contributor to our comfort in affluence is a firm conviction that our relative well-being is largely earned, a product of talent and perseverance, not the grace of God nor the vagaries of fortune.

Hugh Nibley incisively characterizes the Church's preoccupation with wealth and its acceptance of inequality: "the two marks of the Church I see are and have been for a long time these: a reverence for wealth and a contempt for the scriptures. Naturally, these two go hand in hand. We should call attention to the fact that these things we are doing are against the work of the Lord. . . . And now the Church isn't just shot through with covetousness, it is *saturated* with covetousness" (in Strack 1983, 13). Extending Nibley's observation, we could ask an unsettling question: Just as someone might drift into a series of intimate relationships with more than one partner, the affairs assuming a taken-for-granted quality, might many of us in the Church have become so conditioned to the inequality and competitiveness of our environment that we are incapable of considering it a problem?

In an effort to make it more problematic, I devote the rest of this essay to the possibility of an alternative social formation.

#### THE UTOPIAN COMMUNALISTS

Dependency is the attribute that best represents the social character of the Utopian Communalists, the cross of Charismatic and Communitarian Ideal.

As Charismatics they naturally depend upon the spirit of the Lord. Charismatics feel guided by the hand of the Lord and constantly attribute both their spiritual and material blessings to the grace of God. It is not that they do not feel exempt from diligent labor but believe rather that the Lord hallows their efforts — work that might otherwise be left unrewarded.

Dependency is also inherited from the Communitarian Ideal side of the Utopian's social personality. An organic community, as opposed to a collection of individuals, promotes mutual dependency. The labor of the community requires many hands. Any community member is at once both a beneficiary of his or her fellows' care and a contributor to the well-being of others. Interdependence is a community virtue, while practiced independence is a vice that turns brothers and sisters to associates.

Charismatic devotion may to some appear to resemble Christian Fundamentalism, but it finds fulfillment in an all-embracing community, whereas Christian Fundamentalism is grounded in marketplace individualism. The popular psychotherapist M. Scott Peck in *The Different Drum, Community Making and Peace* has also noted the natural connection between the spiritual and the communal. He develops four stages of spiritual growth that resemble the social character types of this essay: Stage I: Chaotic, anti-social; Stage II: Formal, institutional [Iron Rod]; Stage III: Skeptical, individual [Liahona]; Stage IV: Mystical, communal [Utopian Communalist]. On the connection between the "mystical" (Charismatic) and community, Peck observes that "through the ages, mystics of every shade of religious belief have spoken of unity, of an underlying connectedness between things: between men and women, between us and the other creatures and even inanimate matter as well, fitting together according to an ordinarily invisible fabric underlying the cosmos" (1987, 192).

If we, then, depend upon God for our spiritual nourishment and upon community for our material subsistence, we cannot claim either special privilege for achievement or accept condemnation for failure. God blesses, and joy and sorrow are shared equally in Community.

Two overarching principles follow from the Utopian Communalists' double dependency on God and their neighbors. The first is the norm of equality, and the second, the imperative of cooperation. If the Lord freely blesses the secular ambitions of one of his children yet allows everyday contingencies to frustrate another's worldly struggle, then only arrogance would permit the first to enjoy affluence while a brother or a sister suffers relative deprivation. And if it is God who ultimately blesses his children with the necessities of body and spirit, then it is incumbent upon brothers and sisters to share freely their Father's benevolence.

The Utopian's particularly Mormon roots reinforce the importance of equality. If our Heavenly Father would share everything he has and knows with his children, then surely a community of believers is obligated to share everything they have with each other.

An organic community based on equality cannot function effectively without a high degree of cooperation. Community members help and work with

each other to share scarce resources rather than to compete for them. This vision of the ideal community is, then, diametrically opposed to the inequality and competition that characterize economic life in either the Corporate Center or Entrepreneurial Right.

In addition to the defining characteristics of equality and cooperation, Mormon Utopians would no doubt add three more qualities to their vision of ideal communities: (1) community self-reliance, (2) voluntary simplicity, and (3) ecological integrity.

### *Community Self-Reliance*

Community self-reliance is a long-standing Mormon ideal that has been honored much more in rhetoric than in practice. From the Utopian Communalist perspective, community self-reliance would be a venture in total commitment, moving beyond the limited contemporary practice of offering mutual aid to developing actual community independence. Congregations would become economically self-sufficient by growing their own food, making their own clothes, and constructing their own furniture. Self-reliant communities would benefit in two ways. First, spiritual benefits would flow from the intense cooperation community self-reliance demands. Second, a self-reliant community would be less vulnerable to a world system that relentlessly undermines community independence and ultimately destroys community itself.

Transnational corporations of the Corporate Center manage the resource flows that alternately impoverish and temporarily enrich the regions in which they operate. These powerful social actors desert productive communities to seek less expensive workers and then move on again when labor costs rise. Since the world system is based on values (competition and inequality) that are fundamentally antithetical to the Utopian Communalist's virtues of equality and cooperation, it is a system beyond remediation. The only alternative to the chronic compromises of living in this competitive economic system is separation in self-reliant communities.

This suggestion may be radical, but it is not unique. Hugh Nibley has analyzed the phenomenon of "Churches in the Wilderness": the not infrequent scriptural accounts of groups of believers trying to live God's laws separating themselves from those who ignore the Lord's directions. The Israelite flight from Egypt, the Book of Mormon migrations, and the record of separatist communities from the Dead Sea Scrolls all testify that utopian communities are not idiosyncratic in the flow of religious history. Referring to Lehi's predicament, Nibley observes, "A society on the brink of destruction is not a safe place to linger, and so we are immediately introduced to the *Rekhabite* motif: 'Come out of her, oh my people! Partake not of her sins lest ye partake of her plagues' (cf. Jeremiah 35)," and then on a more general level summarizes, "So here we have two sharply divided societies to whose *irreconcilable* views there is only one solution — *separation*" (1988, 15, 16, emphasis added).

### *Voluntary Simplicity*

Self-reliance demands a style of living directly opposed to the high consumption ethos of mainstream America. Voluntary simplicity means the con-

scious choice of a simple, low-consumption lifestyle, not the "involuntary simplicity" of barren, unadorned poverty. Voluntary simplicity prefers spiritual goods over material and resembles the poet Wordsworth's ideal of "plain living and high thinking."<sup>7</sup>

Church members grown comfortable in an affluent middle America may strenuously object to what they foresee as the inevitable primitivism of community self-reliance. While it is certainly true that the ideals of voluntary simplicity and self-reliance diverge sharply from the advertised goals of a leisure-dominated high-technology future, the dramatic everyday difference that voluntary simplicity and community self-reliance would demand is as much a matter of attitude and awareness as a change in work routines. The new attitudes center on conservation and reinforce the prudent use of resources. These attitudes require an awareness of the repercussions of our actions and a constant monitoring of personal and community impact on the environment.

### *Ecological Integrity*

The attitudes I speak of can be illustrated with a simple example. Rather than using five gallons of water to flush our toilets, shift our waste around the globe, and thus pollute other people's drinking water, we may redefine the once repugnant waste as a resource to be composted and transformed into rich, life-giving soil. We could turn technology toward ways of life that are self-sustaining and consciously cyclic, developing, for example, affordable composting toilets, passive solar heating, solar greenhouses, and material recycling.

Community self-reliance and voluntary simplicity reflect a way of life that is ecologically responsible. Ecological integrity springs from our most visible dependency, on the earth as a living host for humankind's spiritual pilgrimage. In the best tradition of Christian stewardship, Utopians would feel it our duty to care for and improve the gift of the good land the Lord has given us.

Despite my agrarian coloring of the Utopian vision of the good community, there is no reason why, at least in theory, urban versions of these communities would not prosper. Self-reliant urban homes and communities, however, are likely to have fish tanks in basements, chicken coops in the backyard, and intensive gardens on rooftops. Their residents would be involved in a variety of conservation activities and would trade produce and recycled goods within the neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

### UTOPIAN POSSIBILITIES

With this sketch of the Utopian Communalists now before us, the question arises, how realistic is this vision? Are there significant numbers of Church members who hold a Utopian Communalist view of the world, however unarticulated their perspective might be? And more important, is there a critical

<sup>7</sup> Discussions of simple living can be found in Duane Elgin (1981), Warren Johnson (1985), and David Shi (1985). Or, in brief, I paraphrase from Ivan Illich's *Tools for Conviviality* (1973): "The good life will only arrive by bicycle."

<sup>8</sup> Visions and blueprints of self-reliant cities can be found in David Morris (1982), Sim Van der Rhyn and Peter Calthorpe (1986), and Nancy Jack Todd and John Todd (1984). A larger picture of self-reliant regions has been sketched out by Kirkpatrick Sale (1985).

mass, however much of a minority, of Watchmen, or even influential Scribes, who subscribe to at least the outlines of the Utopian agenda? The answers, of course, are empirical and await verification by students of social character. Nevertheless, I would like to venture a few observations on the nature of the social and cultural forces that lead us both towards and away from the Utopian Communalist ideal.

I believe our heritage of communitarian experiments in Missouri and pre-statehood Utah, plus the modern emphasis on community and Church discipline at the ward level, influences Latter-day Saints who are Utopian Communalists at least in embryo. For example, the 1987 Relief Society course of study, *Learn of Me*, discusses the failure of the Missouri experiment but holds out the promise that "we expect to be allowed to live these principles [united order/law of consecration] someday" (1986, 60).

If so, then the utopian communities may turn out to be only an extension, though a very critical and fundamental extension, of a Mormon ward's organization. The ward "owns" its members' time and at least part of their money. The bishopric spends members' donations on their behalf and extends calls and releases to positions. No one claims exclusive rights to any ward position, and few would give more than a passing thought to their budget contributions being used to purchase Primary supplies. Consequently, while a move to a more pervasive community could not be accomplished without its own special brand of trauma, it would in reality be a matter of organizational progression, rather than one of discontinuity.

The question of history, however, haunts any discussion of Mormon communitarianism. Will separate Mormon communities be tolerated in the late twentieth century any more than they were in the nineteenth? While a definitive answer is impossible, it is worth noting the general cultural permissiveness of contemporary society. The "do your own thing" mentality may not denounce Mormon separatism as anything other than peculiar. Difficulties, though, would come as the Mormon communities became powerful and independent actors in local and regional economies, prompting animosity from smaller and less well-organized competitors. But if such communities took seriously the ideals of self-sufficiency and simple living, the impact on their neighbors would likely be less threatening.

The different lifestyles and encounters with the outside world of the Hutterites and the Amish are instructive in terms of the resistance separate Mormon communities might face. The Hutterites participate actively in regional and international economies, though their production is communal. Consequently, there have been legislative attempts to control Hutterite expansion in Western Canada. On the other hand, the noncommunal, but cooperative Amish, living much simpler lives, appear to suffer more from cultural-religious discrimination.

But utopian communities do have to count on resistance. The question, however, in terms of Mormon social character is whether the majority of us have become so acculturated into the American mainstream that we now lack the will even to consider the possibility of separate and all-encompassing com-

munities. If much of the influential leadership of the Church has grown comfortable in Middle America, then it is likely that only a series of very severe social crises will create a climate for a reexamination, revelation, and reapplication of the communitarian past.

Are we, though, not close to the crisis of another Great Depression and the anarchy that could trail Watts-like behind it? The crucial question for the Cassandra in me is not so much whether there will be another Great Depression, but its depth and breadth — and, more important, what will we do about it when it comes. While Pollyannas talk about “safeguards” and lessons learned from the last depression, it seems to the Cassandras unlikely that a major crisis can sidestep so many critical and interrelated variables: debt (Third World, corporate, farm, and consumer), deficits (pushed by an unproductive military buildup), trade imbalances, expensive environmental repairs, technological unemployment (the microchip revolution), deindustrialization, and heightened social and economic polarization. All these ills are exacerbated by unadorned greed in all its individual manifestations and in the corporate dictum: migrate, automate, or evaporate! Will the remedy to the crash be New Deal/Neo-Liberal policies that will give the world more “bread lines knee-deep in wheat” (Poppendieck 1986), or might tightly knit groups like the Church seize the time to construct just social orders?

My immediate concern, however, is not the future. It is a more fundamental and profound moral crisis that has haunted us for some time already. I see it in the contrast between the corpulence of East Bench Salt Lake and the hollow eyes of children from Manila’s Smoky Mountain — a garbage dump where thousands live. Surely the gospel can redeem the children of Smoky Mountain, but how long must we wait for its liberating powers to flow freely? Will we have to wait until Watchmen and Scribes begin to lose their positions of sinecure in the Corporate Center and then find that the solutions to their problems are the same solutions that could even now feed the hungry and clothe the naked of God’s Church?

#### CONCLUSION

Each of the characterizations described in this essay is a composite of social tensions, strains, and contradictions. The Entrepreneurs, heirs of much of Mormon political folk life, find themselves increasingly on the margins of a once parochial church that now moves in the world of the Corporate Center. Scribes, the Liahona element of the Corporate Center, see themselves as progressives, trying to push and pull their church into open dialogue with the aggrieved elements of a liberal coalition (women, single parents, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals). Watchmen, the Iron Rods of the Corporate Center, cautiously move the Church forward, representing the Church as the embodiment of all that is noble in the American dream, yet lashing out at the moral decay that surrounds the institutions they cherish. The Utopian Communalists possess no identifiable constituency. They suffer in isolation the frustrations of being so close yet so far from the community they covet, while they wait for the Church they love to divorce itself from the American center.



This picture presents Mormon social character in its various manifestations as ill-at-ease in its several environments, if not in turmoil. Mormonism has yet to define its character, or its characters. As a movement that demands solidarity of purpose, it is deeply troubled by growing diversity. Yet it is this identity crisis that gives the Church part of its dynamic quality. As long as the social character of the Church does not calcify, the dialectic of its everyday confrontation with the world and its own faithful members still carries the possibility of moving it towards the fulfillment of its original promises.

Richard Poll's essay, which inspired this exercise in social analysis, did not attempt to characterize the personality of an entire church and charter its movement. Poll's intent was to announce to the LDS community that there is more than one kind of committed Church member. Poll's primary concern was authoritarianism, as he attempted to carve a niche for the Liahonas, archetypical free-thinking believers. Much of my analysis turns instead on the issues of inequality and social justice.<sup>9</sup> My Utopian Communalists are thoroughly egalitarian.

What are we to make of our differences? Much of Mormon critical thought, both before and after Poll, has been preoccupied with authoritarianism in its various manifestations, from patriarchy to political orthodoxy. Mormon authoritarianism is not an issue I wish to ignore. I have defined the Charismatic attitude as a third alternative and more independent relation to religious authority, in contrast to Iron Rod compliance. But my analysis leads me to wonder whether authoritarianism is not analytically epiphenomenal, though very real in its everyday consequences. At its root, authoritarianism springs from inequality. (Those in authority are "superior" to those they direct.) And so I cannot help believing that if we were somehow to come together, men and women raising children and working side by side both in the kitchen and the machine shop, we would in one way or another resolve the problem of authoritarianism, though not without pain and vigilance.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime, I will continue to enjoy my associations with fellow Saints, however limited I consider those relationships to be. My love of things Mormon sustains me. While the portraits of the social types painted above were

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<sup>9</sup> Even at the end of the essay I still feel the need to clarify and reemphasize my overriding concern. Material inequality is not the problem as much as its inevitable by-product: a community where members unequally possess the resources for self-actualization. I do not for one moment, though, doubt that a loving Father will "consecrate [the] afflictions" of his disadvantaged children "for [their eternal] gain" (2 Ne. 2:2). But I am worried about what the conservation of however slight an advantage might mean for the spiritual welfare of the rest of us, both here and in the hereafter.

<sup>10</sup> My use of "kitchen" and "machine shop" is thoroughly self-conscious. I work from the assumption that much of inequality and consequent authoritarianism is rooted in dependency and its associated powerlessness. It seems more than coincidence that women in the Church during the first part of this century lost their institutional rights to healing, laying on of hands, and washing and anointings (Newell 1987) at the same time they were becoming progressively dependent economically (males *outside* the home becoming primarily income earners). Mutual economic dependence, whether on the frontier or in a utopian community, patriarchal rhetoric notwithstanding, is a potent resource for correcting gender inequality. For a cross-cultural treatment of the material bases of dependence and mutual dependence and their outcomes, see Bossen 1984.



not uncritical, in the end I celebrate the diversity that is Mormonism, convinced that in this imperfect world, or even in a perfect one, oneness does not have to mean sameness.

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