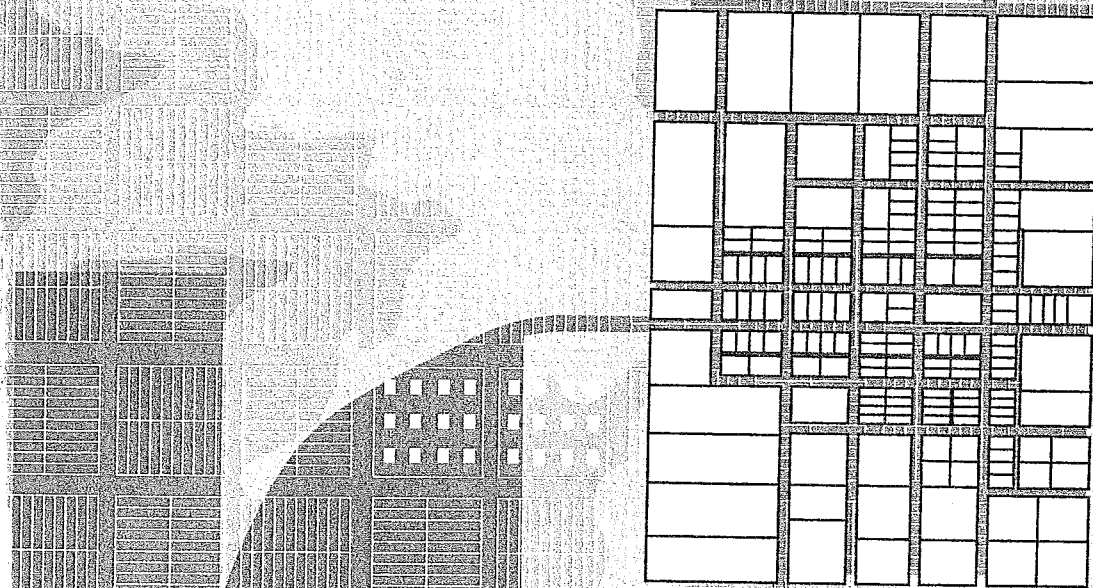


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JWHA's purposes are to create and encourage interest in Latter Day Saint history, especially the history of the Community of Christ, promote communication, research, and publication in the field of Latter Day Saint history, and provide vehicles for the dissemination of scholarly research to people interested in Latter Day Saint history.

Papers for consideration will be reviewed by the Editorial Board on an annual basis and should be submitted in a digital file (preferably Microsoft Word) using the *Chicago Manual of Style* format. Send all submissions to John Hamer by email: JHamer@JohnWhitmerBooks.com.

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Map showing the August 1833 revised plat of the City of Zion with its twenty-four proposed temples superimposed on the existing (1827) plat of Independence, Missouri. The journal's title page includes a diagram of the original June 1833 plat of Zion. Diagrams and cover design by John Hamer.



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Performance in Faith-based Organizations as a Function of Mission Clarity, Coherence, and Focus

George W. Mechling and Roger M. Higgs

Introduction

Management theory provides many conceptual tools with which to analyze organizational performance. Initially, it may seem that one should restrict the use of these tools to analyzing only the performance of business organizations because they are in a competitive arena. Religious organizations, however, also compete in environments where religious adherents are relatively free to choose a particular creed and denomination. Therefore, it seems entirely appropriate to assume that the conceptual tools of management theory can be useful in analyzing the performance of religious organizations.

Strategic management is a specialized branch of the management discipline that deals with the long-term issues of organizational performance. For this reason, strategic management is particularly applicable to the study of religious organizations because many performance measures of such organizations involve trends that can only be observed and verified with the passage of time. Controlled for population growth, membership growth would, for example, be such a critical and appropriate, albeit gross, measure of a voluntary organization's performance.

A strategic management concept potentially useful in analyzing the performance of any organization is its organizational mission. There is an implicit assumption that an organization's mission can be a basis for it performing successfully in the long run. Do organizational missions, well or poorly conceived, or the lack thereof, make a difference in the relative performances of faith-based organizations? This is an important question for this study to answer because little if any existing empirical work tests the connections between organizational performances and organizational missions. Work attempting to remedy this deficiency would be useful in improving the ability of managers to strategically direct their organizations more effectively.¹

¹This is true for non-profit organizations and religious or faith-based organizations in particular. Unlike business organizations where it is relatively easy to test connections between organizational performance and missions with various easily accessed accounting, marketing, and production measures, performance measures for religious or faith-based organizations are not so neatly and unambiguously defined. This makes testing the connections between their organizational missions and performances more problematic.

This study focuses on two religious organizations that arose from the Early Restoration Movement (ERM)² after it fragmented with the assassination of its founder, Joseph Smith Jr. (Smith). One is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) frequently referred to by the term "Mormons," a name it inherited from the ERM. Its headquarters is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. The other is the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (official abbreviation: RLDS) that in 2001 changed its name to Community of Christ and whose headquarters is located in Independence, Missouri. This church will be referred to throughout this study as RLDS (pre-2001) and CofChrist (post-2001) as appropriate. Although having a common origin these two organizations constitute drastically diverging cases whose organizational missions and performances this study can critically analyze and assess in addressing its research question.

The authors have organized this study as follows. Part 1 consists of an exposition of the essentials of an organizational mission noting that whether an organizational mission is stated or informally understood is immaterial. It anticipates how the ERM and LDS and RLDS churches match up with respect to these essentials and upon which the study will subsequently elaborate. Part 1 concludes by restating this study's research question in the context of this match-up. Part 2 provides an analysis of the historical development of the organizational mission of the movement Joseph Smith Jr. founded. Part 3 provides a brief analysis of the historical development of the organizational mission of the LDS faction that Brigham Young initially led. Part 4 provides an analysis of the historical development of what passed as the organizational mission of the RLDS Church that Joseph Smith III (JSIII)³ initially led. The authors will show that this was in fact not a *mission* at all, and that it proved problematic for the faction well into the mid-twentieth century. Part 4 then concludes examining post-1950 faction developments as they pertain to organizational missions. Part 4's presentation requires a rather extensive analysis of the historical record. Thus, it is substantially longer than Part 3. Part 5 analyzes the respective membership growth rates of both factions. Part 6 contains the summary and conclusions that consist of observations the study renders and questions for future work to address.

²The ERM included the years between approximately 1830 and 1846, from the inception of the church to the beginning of the migration to the West after the founder's assassination in 1844. During this period the church had several names, but in the last few years of this period (as well as today) was known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nicknamed the "Mormon" church.

³Joseph Smith Jr.'s eldest son.

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Part One: The Essentials of an Organizational Mission

An organization's mission provides clarity of group purpose while focusing it on what to do to accomplish that purpose in ways that can sustain it and hold it together. A familiar "laundry list" of items often found in mission statements logically follows from this basic understanding of an organizational mission.⁴

A mission may be expressed *formally* in "hardcopy." However, the lack of a formally articulated mission statement does not necessarily mean the organization lacks a mission. An organizational mission can exist informally as well, in the traditions, culture, and understanding of the organization. As a result, some students of organizational strategy argue that there needs to be more than what the typical mission statement provides the organization in terms of directional focus. This has led to the use of the term "vision" in today's practitioner and academic literature and the subsequent creation of "vision statements."⁵

An organization's mission must also be general enough to have the flexibility to be applicable to specific evolving situations. A company in the past, for example, may have stated that it intended to design and build the best carburetors. Another, however, may have stated that it intended to design and build the best energy delivery systems to power passenger vehicles. To the extent the former scrupulously adhered to its mission, it would with little doubt now be out of business. The mission statement of the latter, on the other hand, is general enough to allow it to embrace carburetor production, followed by the production of fuel injection systems, and maybe even electrical energy cells and new age capacitors if its membership at any point in time recognizes which energy delivery system and set of passenger vehicles need to be in play at the moment.

Missions also serve to differentiate organizations of similar purpose from each other in order to provide buyers a rationale for choosing between them.⁶

⁴On inspection of any management textbook one will find that mission statements refer to goals, measures of success, customer and product identification, social responsibility, etc. All or some of these items may be present—most often not all of them. And no two mission statements, for reasons that need not be explored here, can be counted on to have the same mix.

⁵The authors of this study hold, however, that a correctly framed mission statement eliminates the need for vision statement documents when it is coupled to clear communication and hence, for the most part, unambiguous understanding as to how an organization intends to go about making its mission operational.

⁶The strategic management periodical literature is replete with examples of this understanding of organizational mission statements. See, for example, Mary Klem, Stuart Sanderson, and George Luffman, "Mission Statements: Selling Corporate Values to Employees," *Long-Range Planning* 24, no. 3 (1991): 73–78; John C. Crotts, Dundan R. Dickson, and Robert C. Ford, "Aligning Organizational Processes with Mission: The Case of Service Excellence," *Academy of Management Executive* 19, no. 3 (August 2005): 54–68; Aimee Forehand, "Mission and Organizational Performance in the Healthcare Industry," *Journal of Healthcare Management* 45, no. 4 (July/August 2000): 267–77; and, Alan Farnham, "Brushing Up Your Vision Thing," *Fortune*,

This is absolutely critical. Without this differentiation, how an organization performs becomes dependant on buyer decisions that are unrelated to the way it chooses to present itself to potential customers. Organizations tend to frown on being in such a predicament because it leaves them without having any involvement with what influences customer choice. Rather, they favor an approach where differentiating themselves from other organizations of similar purpose offers a clear choice to buyers, segments of which they can now target.

An organization's mission, therefore, dictates how an organization goes about fulfilling its purpose. Consider the emergence of the Restoration Movement in the early part of the nineteenth century. The inspiration for this movement began with Smith's "grove experience" in upstate New York in 1819. He went to that grove first and foremost out of concern for his soul's salvation, a concern he shared in common with countless others whom the Second Revival Period was intensely influencing. However, as a result of his "grove experience," Smith began to formulate a sense of mission that he subsequently developed and embodied in the religious movement he founded—a movement that sharply distinguished itself from other Judeo-Christian traditions.

Mormon, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, etc., organizations are quite similar. Each creates a self-contained system of legitimization and plausibility that constitutes a bulwark of meaning and order against the existential anomie of life's marginal experiences that haunt us all.⁷ These organizations accomplish a common purpose but create that bulwark as a function of their own respective missions, thus providing each of them a basis for differentiating itself from the others. It is the discovery of a mission, albeit embryonic in form, that subsequently summons the organization into being. It is in the discovery of how to *uniquely* accomplish and make concrete a purpose to which others can assent, and around which a membership of adherents can coalesce, that a potential founder or founders of an organization are energized to take action.

A religious organization's mission should also provide it a scheme for allocating resources that effectively reify connections between its own belief system and the organizational forms it takes. The former legitimizes the latter and the latter lend plausibility to the former thus creating for the organization a set of dynamic, self-contained relationships that constitutes its bulwark for differentiating itself from other organizations of like purpose. Without such mission-directed schemes, organizations tend to wander in the wilderness of conflicting and competing decisions with their resource allocation decisions susceptible to short-term pressures and the whims of current leadership. As situations change, an organization's leaders may be tempted to take the

May 1, 1995, 129. Furthermore, most any introductory management text one cares to peruse will echo this same understanding of organizational mission.

⁷Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969). See part 1 for a complete discussion of such existential constructs.

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organization into first one direction and then others as different opportunities present themselves. Such changes of direction due to short-term pressures usually lead to inefficiencies that hinder effective organizational performance in the long run. A mission may not of course be sufficient to guarantee organizational success. Nevertheless, a mission plays a vital role in the healthy, effective, and efficient performance of an organization by providing it a rational, coherent basis on which to make its resource allocation decisions.

An organizational mission can be lost because the founder leaves the organization for whatever reason, with the mission left unformulated to a greater or lesser degree.⁸ An organization in this circumstance is left with the task of composing a mission from the fragments the founder left behind or attempting to survive without one. While it may be possible to survive, even long term, without a mission, it is unlikely that an organization's performance will be as good as it would have been otherwise.

A sense of mission can, over time, evolve. Smith was a relatively young man when he died. His articulation of the church's mission was incomplete to some extent since it had been evolving as he directed the movement. With his assassination, where the mission's evolutionary path was leading was, therefore, not altogether clear for the organization. At this critical juncture, the church membership was presented with two very different and competing notions of what the mission should be. Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon, in vying for the leadership of the church, represented these different and competing notions.⁹ Brigham Young believed that he possessed the knowledge of Smith's mission for the organization.¹⁰ Sidney Rigdon, on the other hand, as a counselor to Smith, argued that the movement should now vest him as its guardian inasmuch as he claimed to have been called to intercede for it with the fallen prophet, thus providing the church uninterrupted prophetic direction.¹¹ In the end, Young prevailed arguing convincingly that, like with the primitive church where authority passed from its crucified Lord to its apostles, authority now passed from the fallen prophet to his apostolic quorum.¹²

Some influential leaders also had reasons to believe that Smith had designated his eldest son, Joseph Smith III, to be his successor. His son, however,

⁸ This happened when Dave Thomas left Wendy's, Juan Trippe left Pan Am, and when Smith was assassinated.

⁹ Young was president of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles at the time of Smith's death. Rigdon was, however, a counselor to Smith and a member of what was referred to as the "First Presidency." The First Presidency was to be composed of the church's prophet (Smith) and two counselors. John C. Bennett had been one of these counselors in the Nauvoo Period along with Rigdon but had left the church disgraced, leaving only Rigdon in the presidency as a counselor.

¹⁰ Roger Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 32-33.

¹¹ Robert Flanders, *Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 312.

¹² Ibid., 313-16.

was only twelve years old at that time and was not in a position to assume such a responsibility. Therefore, he was never in the running for consideration as the organization's leader.¹³ If in fact JSIII had been bequeathed knowledge of the ERM's mission, it would have taken some time for it to manifest itself, and at that moment time was something the movement did not have.

This study will use the ERM movement and its subsequent split into two of several factions, the LDS (led by Young) and RLDS (eventually led by JSIII), as a basis for investigating organizational mission-based performances.¹⁴ From its inception, the original church had a bona fide organizational mission (although in flux) and it enjoyed great organizational success albeit qualified by its failure to amicably interact with its surrounding gentile communities. Young successfully composed and installed a version of Smith's mission and organized those who followed him into the LDS Church. Once in the Great Basin, the faction prospered and continues to do so. On the other hand, from its outset the RLDS faction's success in composing an effective version of Smith's mission or, technically speaking, composing any mission at all is questionable. It has struggled since to maintain its vitality as its growth and financial strength lag relatively far behind that of the LDS faction.¹⁵

Can one therefore infer connections between a coherent or fragmented sense of organizational mission, or none at all, and an organization's success or lack thereof?¹⁶ This study strives to answer this fundamental question by

¹³ Ibid., 311-12; Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 31-32.

¹⁴ The ERM splintered into a number of factions following Smith's death. The faction that Young led (LDS) was by far the most prominent and remains so to the present day and continues to bear the ERM's official name, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The faction that JSIII eventually led (RLDS) was not part of the splintering that took place at the time the LDS emerged. Rather, the RLDS Church officially formed some sixteen years following Smith's death and was composed initially of various factions that had also emerged at the time of Smith's death or from some of their spinoffs. The authors reserve major discussion of this formation for a later study.

¹⁵ To suggest that the RLDS faction was and continues to be bereft of an organizational mission may seem extreme. Certainly the faction had reasons for hanging together and even attracting adherents that presumably to some extent the expenditure of its resources supported. Nevertheless, the authors' notion of organizational mission is a technical one involving both the articulation of organizational uniqueness along with an understanding of how to reify that uniqueness. This study will subsequently show that from its beginning the RLDS faction engaged in substantially dismantling its inherited ERM mission. Thus, it severely attenuated its uniqueness in terms of the relationship between what is both articulated and reified because it did not invent something that could have replaced that of which it divested itself. What that might have been could have been some efficacious reinterpretation of those unique elements in its past of which it had divested itself or something altogether novel. Neither occurred and the faction (now Community of Christ) currently appears, as of today, not to have effectively reclaimed that uniqueness as can only be embodied in a bona fide organizational mission.

¹⁶ It seems logical to assume that an organization that has a well-thought-out mission by which it understands its past and guides the planning of its decisions in the present so as to project itself into a desirable future stands a better chance of realizing at least some aspects of that desirable future than if it had a plan not well thought out or, worse, none at all. Consequently, this assumption has for the most part been regarded more as an axiom rather than a hypothesis to test.

examining the missions and performances of the ERM and two of its factions, the LDS Church and the RLDS Church/CofChrist.¹⁷

Part Two: The Historical Development of the ERM's Organizational Mission

The original church's organizational mission appears to consist of preaching the gospel, perfecting the saints, and ministering to the dead.¹⁸ Preaching the gospel was clearly the most programmatically developed. While conceptually and programmatically incipient at the time of Smith's death, the historical evidence appears to indicate that by the Nauvoo period perfecting the saints and ministering to the dead constituted two additional directions in which the ERM's sense of organization mission was evolving.

As a result of his first grove experience, Smith came to the conviction that he had been divinely chosen to be the means through which the one and only true church established by Jesus of Nazareth was to be restored to the earth.¹⁹ This church had disappeared many centuries earlier with the loss of its authority to efficaciously function due to the apostasy of its earthly leadership and members. The various denominations and sects then constituting Christendom were, therefore, nothing more than the "wreckage" that remained from the loss of ecclesiastical authority and the inadequate and feeble attempts of humankind to preserve or retrieve from that wreckage what of value they could. This restored church would, therefore, be a repository of the gospel's "fullness" in both a penultimate and ultimate or complete sense. Revelation was an on-going activity by which Divinity specifically revealed more of what it willed for the movement as it grew in its capacity to bear the challenge of embodying that will and doing what it was directed to do. Thus, the gospel's fullness at any one point in time is penultimate. However, being an on-going activity, revelation of that will was what the gospel to be "full" *ultimately* meant.

¹⁷ From a methodological point of view, the authors recognize that establishing a causal linkage between having, or not having, a bona fide mission and an organization's success or lack of it is problematic. Nevertheless, the authors take an initial step with this present effort in beginning to amass warrants for inductively strengthening the case that one can make for the existence of such a linkage.

¹⁸ Some might regard the communitarian ventures of the ERM as another aspect of its organizational mission. This study's authors do not, but regard those ventures as more in keeping with the technology employed to facilitate the *implementation* of the movement's mission.

¹⁹ The readership no doubt is familiar with Smith's grove experience and the cultural and historical setting in which it occurred. Therefore, there is little need to delve into that here in any detail except to clarify for the reader what, in the authors' view, was some of the content of that "gospel preached."

Smith received spiritual instruction, published the Book of Mormon, established various sacraments,²⁰ and instituted a priesthood authorized to administer those sacraments between the time of his grove experience and formally organizing the church in 1830. From that time to his death, religious observance in the ERM became more sacramental in character,²¹ its doctrinal base expanded, the movement experimented with communitarianism, and of necessity it became migratory from time to time while ever becoming also a powerful political, economic, and controversial presence wherever it settled. To its adherents, it was a divine redemptive activity that had taken hold in the world of humankind of which they had been graced to be a part.

The "good news" the church proclaimed, advertised, and promoted was a truly unique product that served well to differentiate itself from others. Beginning with a mere handful of adherents in the 1820s, the church grew to over ten thousand members by the time of Smith's death. Despite his death, in the two years that followed before its dissolution into rival factions, the church had programs in place to continue its vigorous proselytizing of churched and unchurched, foreign and domestic, at an unabated pace. Following Smith's death, it is remarkable that much of any proselytizing went on at all, let alone at the same level. Thus, one would seem hard pressed to convincingly argue that to proselytize the world through a campaign of aggressively "preaching" its understanding of the gospel's "fullness" was not at least part of the ERM's mission.

* * *

Smith also had an interest in "perfecting" his movement's membership. Toward the end of his life and tenure as the movement's leader, and with the construction of the Nauvoo temple underway, this interest was well on the way to becoming a programmatic reality.

Any organization must have a set of norms (rules of behavior) that stipulate obligations, prohibitions, and permissions to which its members comply. Norms are necessary so organizations can maintain internal order and coherence and effectively engage their environments. Smith defined compliance to the norms he devised as the membership's pursuit of "perfection," but significantly, not its attainment, which was particularly ingenious on his part. By the time of the Nauvoo era and more specifically the construction of the Nauvoo temple, he was tentatively combining into ritualistic forms characteristic features of the Second Revival with the church's ecclesiastical authority.

²⁰ These sacraments consisted of but were not necessarily limited to ordination, baptism, confirmation, administration to the sick, and marriage.

²¹ To the ordinances or sacraments, such as ordination, baptism, confirmation, administration to the sick, and marriage, Smith added more exotic practices during the early 1840s, including eternal sealings, celestial marriage, and baptism for the dead.

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The Second Revival Period out of which the ERM emerged was characterized by intense emotion and piety. It was not uncommon for persons caught up in the spirit of this revival to experience divine manifestations and with that the subsequent reorganizations of their sentiments. With respect to the ERM, such experiences invariably confirmed the movement's validity. This inclined the recipients of such experiences to then affiliate with the new church or to renew and intensify their commitments to the movement's enterprise if they were already church members. Smith consequently realized that he might be able to more effectively manage the membership's commitment to promoting the movement's interests both in intensity and focus by mediating the organization of its sentiments with an expanded ERM repertoire of sacramental rites.

The ERM initiated individuals into its membership with two rites of passage, baptism and confirmation, that symbolized in part their commitment to comply with the movement's norms. This set of associational norms was not, however, some minimum standard to which Smith would oblige the membership to comply. Rather, it was a set of ever-increasing demands to which he then affixed corresponding additional rites of passage to sanctify and seal one at higher levels of spiritual stature. Upon successfully complying with a subset of these norms one would become eligible to participate in at least some of these rites and thus be made ready for aspiring to the next higher level of organizational demands and spiritual stature. Inasmuch as these rites were points where legitimization and plausibility coincided, Smith put in place incentives to induce the membership to always embrace more of what the movement could exact of it. Such a program for "perfecting the saints," to which the membership for the most part willingly ascribed, allowed Smith to more effectively manage its creative energy as the result of institutionalizing its piety and emotional proclivities with a sacerdotal framework. Thus, we conclude that "perfecting the saints," along with aggressively "preaching the fullness of the gospel," was a part of the ERM's mission.

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The ERM's membership, including Smith himself, all had close family members whose deaths preceded the emergence of the church. Given its claim of having restored the gospel's fullness with all the blessings that followed therefrom, there was great concern for the fate and welfare of these deceased loved ones. Furthermore, the church could easily extend this concern logically to anyone who had passed from the earthly scene without knowledge of or the opportunity to accept Christ and the Restoration Movement's gospel fullness.²²

²² This dilemma ran counter to the ERM's frontier sense of fairness and that God should be reasonable as well as merciful. Darby's dispensationalism that appeared in the early 1830s could have provided at least some resolution to this dilemma but, for whatever reasons the authors are not prepared to determine, it apparently did little to shape the resolution that the ERM devised. See Kent Eaton, "Beware the Trumpet

Making these concerns of his membership and his own a "matter of prayer," Smith coupled the ERM's beliefs about individual preexistence—the probationary aspect of one's earthly life—and afterlife to the efficacy and necessity of the rite of baptism to receive the highest level of salvation. Doing so, in mid-January of 1841 Smith introduced the practice of "proxy" baptizing and confirming ERM membership for the dead with the commandment to build the Nauvoo temple wherein the church would conduct this new rite. This new rite was without doubt of great importance to the membership even though it does not appear that it was performed with any great degree of frequency in Nauvoo. Nevertheless, the authors assert that "ministry to the dead" typified by proxy baptisms and confirmations constituted an important direction in which the church's mission was evolving.

The rite of proxy baptisms and confirmations for the deceased was to become an important practice within the LDS faction's religious universe and it continues to be extensively practiced down to the present day. The RLDS faction, on the other hand, never conducted the rite itself, but from its beginning as an organization it speculated as to when it might sometime begin. Only recently could one feel confident in saying that the RLDS faction clearly disposed of this aspect of its ERM legacy.²³

Part Three: The LDS Version of the ERM's Mission

Brigham Young successfully convinced a substantial portion of the Early Restoration Movement's membership following Smith's death that he understood the fallen prophet's vision of the church's unfolding mission. What had been its primary mission, preaching the (fullness of the) gospel, remained. Moreover, the church, even somewhat in disarray following Smith's death,

of Judgement: John Nelson Darby and the Nineteenth-century Brethren," in *The Coming Deliverer: Millennial Themes in World Religions*, ed. Fiona Bowie (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1997), 119–62. (NOTE: Darby did not dream up "dispensationalism." That was a topic of discussion that had been around for some time prior to Darby. He developed, however, a comprehensive and systematic treatment of the subject that has provided much of the foundation of the eschatology of the religious right at present.

²³ Initially, the impediment to the RLDS conducting such a practice was the fact it had no temple within which to perform the rite. The faction, despite speculation as to when it might begin practicing this rite, was never altogether comfortable with it and over time grew increasingly uncomfortable with the prospect of practicing it. Once the faction began to seriously entertain the notion of allocating resources to construct a temple, it was made abundantly clear that its construction was not for such a purpose and that no such rite would be performed in it, or for that matter any other secret practices conducted therein that had characterized the Nauvoo period. Thus, the RLDS faction, for better or for worse, further distanced itself from the ERM's mission in terms of the point to which it had evolved during the Nauvoo period. See Paul M. Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1991), 252, and Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 2 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1992), 2: chapter 37.

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did not abandon it. In the interim between his death and arriving in Utah, the LDS faction continued to allocate substantial resources in the form of valued manpower to support winning converts. The incipient pursuits of "perfecting the saints" and "ministering to the dead" extant with the ERM would not, however, become full-blown parts of the LDS faction's mission to which it would also allocate major portions of its resources until it settled in and around Utah.

Thus, the LDS faction provides one perfectly logical and anticipated evolutionary extension of the ERM and its mission. Its mission is reasonably clear, succinct, and easily understood consisting of preaching the "fullness" (restoration) of the gospel, perfecting the saints, and ministering to the dead. The faction continues to actively proselytize throughout the world approaching both church and unchurched with an active vital missionary program almost exclusively volunteer-staffed.²⁴ It conducts an active program of new temple construction that provides housing for and widespread accessibility to rites of sanctification for both the living and the dead. Its ministry to the dead continues to this day to be of great importance and is supported with a world-class genealogical program.

The LDS faction has been able to successfully accumulate vast resources that it allocates to processes and projects that provide its membership organized structured activities and programs to support and in which to participate. Thus, the church implements its mission in lending plausibility to its membership's belief system that legitimizes what it does. Its leadership has also shown from time to time a clear understanding of the difference between its mission and its implementation by being fluid enough to replace or restructure organizational activities, social norms, and practices as is necessary to better promote the faction's interests.²⁵

Part Four: The RLDS/Community of Christ Versions²⁶ of the ERM's Mission

Jason W. Briggs and Zenos H. Gurley Sr., former Strangite pastors of two of many Strangite and ex-Strangite congregations located mostly in Illinois and Wisconsin, began in the 1850s forming what would become the RLDS Church and eventually Community of Christ. They formally organized the church in

²⁴ Some would argue that the LDS communion has the largest paid ministerial staff of any of the major faiths inasmuch as the "volunteers" who conduct the organization's massive missionary campaign require material support and that must come from somewhere.

²⁵ It has been suggested to the authors by LDS "insiders" that the organization mission has become more that the membership is "to obey the leadership." To whatever extent such compliance is receiving increased emphasis within the organization, the leadership still appears to adhere to its three-part mission in its decision-making.

²⁶ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, chapter 4. The authors have relied extensively on this chapter in writing this part.

1860 following a courtship period at the end of which Joseph Smith III assumed its leadership.

Severely depressed over what seemed to be the irreversible demise of the church following his break with Strang and later with William Smith (Smith's younger brother) primarily because both had succumbed to the practice of polygamy,²⁷ Briggs made guidance for any future course of action he might pursue a matter of prayerful inquiry. In mid-November 1851, Briggs documented what he believed to be an epiphany he had experienced in answer to his inquiry. He had inquired about three issues. Was Smith a false prophet; was polygamy contrary to God's laws; and was lineal succession of church leadership to follow from Smith directly to his descendents? Briggs's revelation as he chose to call this epiphany affirmed the legitimacy of Smith's prophetic role in founding and leading the movement, the contrariness of the practice of polygamy to God's laws, and that succession of church leadership should follow directly from Smith to his descendents. This third point altered how Briggs had previously understood "lineal succession" and consequently made JSIII the most likely candidate to take the leadership of the ERM.

Briggs circulated his document among members of his local congregation and other congregations in the area. Support for the document grew, to which Gurley added his. This growing support eventually generated sufficient pressure on the pastors of many scattered mostly ex-Strangite congregations throughout Illinois and Wisconsin to oblige them to assemble their congregations together in conference at Beloit, Wisconsin, in the spring of 1852. Lacking acknowledged leadership, organization, authority to transact business, or for that matter business to transact, the gathering was however united on the basis of the following organizational tenets (hereafter referred to as the Beloit tenets): 1) acceptance of the Briggs document, 2) opposition to all other ERM factions, 3) belief that the ERM as set forth in its scriptures was correct, and 4) affirmation that the proper successor to Smith was maturing in Nauvoo and one day would accept his calling to lead. Briggs chaired the conference and Gurley managed the meetings. While neither of them was keen on allowing the assembly to implement a formal church organization, they did permit it to ratify a number of resolutions consistent with the Beloit tenets and decided to reconvene later

²⁷ James J. Strang had initially condemned polygamy and evidently believed that JSIII would and should eventually take control of and lead the movement, but his increasingly megalomaniacal and divisive excesses deeply offended and alienated many of his followers causing, along with others, Briggs and Gurley to disassociate themselves from the faction by 1849. Both Briggs and Gurley, now pastors of independently operating congregations, flirted with William Smith's faction for a short time. Briggs was particularly attracted to William because of his advocacy of a lineal succession of leadership for the movement from Smith that Briggs believed had a sound scriptural basis. Briggs was probably not aware at that time that some believed that Smith had designated his son Joseph to lead the church. See Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 77-85.

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²⁸ Ibid.

that year in October. Briggs regarded this conference as successful beyond expectations.²⁸

Two Dynamics Adversely Impacting the Fledgling RLDS Church

Following the Beloit Conference, Briggs and Gurley worked at pulling together scattered and isolated congregations from the then-disintegrating Strang movement or other factions that had become dead-ends or defunct. There is good reason to believe, however, that the persons drawn into this new venture came from various groups with which they had aligned themselves for specific reasons that could put them into conflict with each other in this new organization. They were no doubt earnest and sincere about the reasons for their former alignments and self-evidently independently minded as well. Such attributes are admirable. However, when coupled to the reasons the potential members may have continued to harbor, these attributes had the potential of fueling conflict and imbuing the new faction's culture with some degree of fractiousness and contentiousness. Therefore, Briggs and Gurley required potential faction members to assent to the Beloit tenets in order to preempt such potential conflict from developing. This made the consolidation of the new church a possibility. No doubt Briggs and Gurley achieved a degree of factional uniformity of belief for which the organization would, however, pay a high price.

Assenting to the Beloit tenets could have hardly been a soul-wrenching experience. Most anyone who 1) rejected Brigham Young's claim to church leadership and polygamy whatever its context of occurrence, 2) longed to recover a sense of legitimate participation in the "original church" and a connection to that past, and 3) was disenchanted with the directions the various groups had taken with which they had initially aligned themselves could, for the most part, unreservedly assent to these tenets. Thus, the Beloit tenets constituted a point of overlap for the systems of beliefs and affirmations espoused by these scattered congregations and disparate factions. Those who assented to these points were cleared to join the "New Organization" but by implication did not have to necessarily mollify other accompanying beliefs and affirmations associated with their previous factional alignments. Thus, the basis for consolidating the new faction did not cover all that much common ground or run particularly deep. It was not something that required a great deal of convincing, soul searching, or comprehensive changes in one's ways of thinking.

Furthermore, a critical inspection of the Beloit tenets discloses nothing about them that has anything to do with an organizational mission. These tenets provide no clarity of group purpose, nor do they focus the group on what to do to accomplish that purpose in ways to sustain and hold it together.

²⁸ Ibid., 89.

They are simply a set of beliefs and affirmations by which one could identify a phenomenon of collective assent.²⁹ The faction thus put in place initial internal conditions that would stymie its own effectiveness as an organization because it needed more than what the superficial unity assenting to the Beloit tenets could provide in order to be capable of formulating an organizational mission.³⁰ Strategic management of organizations in such a predicament is difficult if not impossible. Most often, the only remedy for this deficiency entails an extensive transformation of these organizations in which they must substantially redefine themselves. Invariably such transformations painfully disrupt the organizational expectations of some or many persons associated with these organizations. The RLDS faction, most likely, would have proved to be unexceptional in this regard. Joseph Smith III would not have had to push much beyond the Beloit tenets for the purpose of impacting faction policy (e.g., the formulation of an effective organizational mission) before risking conflict, jeopardizing fragile organizational cohesion, or, possibly, isolating himself from its fellowship as a member and discrediting himself as its leader. However, by the time (1860) JSIII affiliated himself with what was the RLDS faction and assumed its leadership, he and the faction were well-aligned doctrinally and for the most part in synch with the Beloit tenets beyond which no one much peered either as a matter of practicality or because of a lack of imagination.³¹ Thus, the faction for the most part was content well into the mid-twentieth century with restricting itself to the pursuit of only those courses of action that were consistent with or elaborations of the beliefs, affirmations, and spirit of the Beloit tenets. Inadvertently, the faction had established within itself an internal dynamic that stymied its organizational effectiveness because this dynamic culturally precluded the possibility of the faction being able to formulate an effective organizational mission.

²⁹ One might defer from judging Briggs, Gurley, and others too harshly for failing to organize the faction around a sense of mission as Young had. They were, after all, deferring to a hopefully not-too-distant future time when JSIII would presumably assume leadership of the church. It would be the new prophet's prerogative to determine where the organization's next step would take it. Nevertheless, initially organized as it was on the basis of the Beloit tenets, the new church could not be anything but a cobbled-together phenomenon.

³⁰ One might argue that the authors make or will make too much of the importance of the Beloit tenets in stymieing the formulation of an organizational mission. The authors do not think so. The merger, acquisition, and consolidation literature is replete with examples where the lack of "due diligence" on the front-end in adequately resolving latent or potential points of conflict or establishing clarity of group purpose, etc., leads invariably to plagued performance of emergent organizations in perpetuity or scuttles them altogether. See Timothy J Galpin and Mark Herndon, *The Corporate Guide to Mergers and Acquisitions: process tools to support M & A at every level*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Business and Management Series, 2007), chapter 2, and Andrew J Sherman and Milledge A. Hart, *Mergers and Acquisitions from A to Z*, 2nd edition (New York: AMACOM, 2006), chapter 5.

³¹ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 116–17.

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A second dynamic also came into play for the RLDS Church with its formation. The new church was populated with a substantial number of former early church members who since the Nauvoo Period now resided in "gentile" communities.³² They had come to value the material and social benefits of doing so and for the moment were ambivalent about separating themselves from these communities in which they were enjoying prosperity and civil peace. The church's eventual decision not to separate from these communities initiated a second but externally oriented historical dynamic that served to distract it from organizationally productive pursuits.

Given their early Restoration background, these "former" members were understandably sensitive and uneasy about their past ties. Their gentile neighbors regarded the early Mormon Church with suspicion and reports they received about the LDS faction in Utah served only to exacerbate their suspicion. Furthermore, a good many of these former ERM members had also experienced the trauma of past hostile interactions between the ERM and the Gentiles and had no interest in experiencing such trauma again. This new faction's leadership was therefore anxious for their church to be seen by Gentiles with whom its members worked and socialized as being populated with "respectable" folk. After years of smarting from what he believed to be the underserved notoriety his father received, JSIII constantly reminded the membership as individuals and an organization that it and they needed to be contributing non-disruptive members of their communities, respectful and supportive of secular government, and never presuming to supplant civil with religious authority.³³

The RLDS faction, however, retained the conviction that it had been given the imperative to realize the communally oriented projects the original church had initiated. Such projects had proved disastrous having made the conduct of harmonious relations between the ERM and the gentile population impossible. Consequently, the faction's leadership for the most part, was of a mind to avoid engaging in potentially disruptive, eccentric, and controversial communitarian ventures and doctrinal practices (gathering into experimental communities, arcane temple rites, etc.) characteristic of the original movement. Effectively harmonizing or resolving this tension between the impulse to be true to its

³² The ERM's membership in considering itself a "special" people often referred to non-members as "Gentiles," seeking to emulate the same distinction Jews made between themselves and non-Jews in the New Testament period (see, for example, Edwards, *Our Legacy of Faith*, 60). Examining documents from early in the RLDS faction's organizational life, however, reveals that the term "Gentile" fell quickly into disuse, being replaced simply by the more innocuous and less stigmatizing term "non-member" since its membership consisted for the most part of persons, who after the dissolution of the ERM had integrated themselves into communities that were overwhelmingly populated by these so-called "Gentiles" with whom former ERM members wanted amicable relationships. See *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1951), vols. 3 and 4, for examples of such documents.

³³ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, chapter 8.

heritage and its desire to continue enjoying the benefits of being a part of a secular civil order became for the faction a subject of much concern during JSIII's leadership.

The RLDS leadership's understanding of its body of scripture to which it appealed as the basis for validating or repudiating ideas concerning organization policy was for the most part straight-forward, literal, legalistic, and staid. This left it with little room for imagination and few conceptual tools to realize its heritage except in the ways with which it was historically familiar. More abstract, less concrete attempts to capture the essence of this heritage would not emerge for almost a century. Thus, the faction leadership's answer to this concern was a pragmatic one born of perceived necessity in which it simply counseled its membership to put the implementation of the more potentially troublesome aspects of its heritage "on hold" for the time being until the time to proceed would be right.

Understandably, faction members shifted their hopes for implementing their communitarian impulses and the recovery of their early heritage into some indefinite future time often with an apocalyptical rationalization (i.e., when such undertakings could be possible and, most likely, necessary).³⁴ This shift was significant because as the result of abandoning any imminent prospects of realizing many of the plausibility structures by which the ERM had reified its belief system, the faction divested itself of a means by which to differentiate itself from other religious organizations. This in turn made the faction a much more moderate, conservative, and non-militant form of Mormonism than its Utah counterpart. It may have had a quirky theology but that became non-threatening because what could have been troublesome about it would be realized only in some indefinite future. Thus, the faction rendered itself essentially harmless and it could now fit loosely within mainstream American Protestant religion.³⁵

* * *

Thus, these two internal and external dynamics at play in the RLDS Church worked to compromise and render largely ineffective its version of the original church's mission. Technically speaking, this version was probably not an organizational mission at all even though it remained in place well into the twentieth century. A brief summary of it follows.

The gospel the faction preached certainly proclaimed God's action through his servant Smith to restore the one true Church with its continuous revelation, sacraments, and an authoritative priesthood to administer them. Nevertheless, this message was laced with an apocalyptical view that deferred

³⁴ The ERM had the sense of urgency as to what it was about that prompted it to action because it believed in an imminent eschaton. On the other hand, the RLDS faction's eschaton was something for which to wait, implying less urgency and/or reduced organizational effectiveness.

³⁵ Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, 91

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the implementation of many of the church's plausibility structures by which to reify much of its belief system to some indefinite future for which it waited.

The RLDS Church also imbued its gospel with a good bit of apologetics to correct, in its view, the misconceptions Gentiles had of the early Mormon Church. It promoted a "sanitized" version of Smith and to a great extent the Nauvoo Era also for the benefit of both its membership and the gentile community in general thereby attempting to lend respectability to both.³⁶ It was virtually obsessed with differentiating itself from the LDS Church in Utah underscoring both doctrinal and practical differences between the two factions.³⁷ It sought to discredit the LDS claim to being the legitimate continuation of the ERM legacy it (the LDS faction) had allegedly besmirched.

Finally, the RLDS Church also found it prudent to restrict the market to which it could aggressively direct its gospel message to available former ERM members it could recover, some family members of faction members unaffiliated with the faction, and the unchurched, or put more precisely, potential adherents for whom competition was open. With respect to the already "churched," only a passive sales model would do, otherwise the faction would have risked engendering gentile hostility and disrupting the communities in which the faction's membership resided.³⁸ The contrast between the RLDS and LDS factions in this regard is stark inasmuch as anyone not affiliated with the LDS faction by definition is "fair game" and subject to being aggressively approached. An organizational mission identifies who its potential customers

³⁶ The RLDS faction labored extensively to make a case that Smith was not a polygamist. Some members argued that the practice was strictly a necessary social invention that emerged after the Nauvoo Period. Others, however, did allow that there might have been a few incidences of polygamy in Nauvoo. Such occurrences, however, were isolated, scattered, and not a part of mainstream Nauvoo life. Consequently, Smith would not have been aware of them. However, to have considered the possibility that polygamy's genesis was in Nauvoo was a concession that would leave the ERM vulnerable to the kind of criticism RLDS members wanted to avoid. The RLDS Church would then have to 1) advance the improbable qualification that despite the fact that Smith micromanaged Nauvoo he had no knowledge that his closest confidants were entertaining thoughts of instituting such a practice while 2) trying not to compromise the very thing (the ERM) of which it wished to establish itself as the legitimate continuation. Therefore, the idea that the practice originated in Utah was a more comfortable position to which the faction could publicly hold and did.

³⁷ Within the RLDS faction the popular notion is that it took the Kirtland, Ohio, experience as its model for pursuing a more moderate form of "Mormonism." However, Howard (RLDS Church historian emeritus) and others would argue that this notion is more an idealization than a fact (see Howard, *The Church Through the Years*, 1: 204).

³⁸ Given the freedom to voluntarily switch religious affiliations, customers, churched or unchurched, can shop religious organizations for the one that offers for them the best "product." What makes this a passive model is the fact that "shopping" is done in a competitive environment where the customer initiates contact with a given organization based on, e.g., what the organization broadcasts about itself to a public whose individuals that constitute it the organization has not individually identified or targeted as a part of its marketing strategy. Marketing would term this an "order taker" model versus the most aggressive "demand creator" and lesser "missionary" models that more aptly characterize the LDS faction's approach to any potential adherents.

are, that is, defines its market. This market must be of sufficient size to sustain and ideally enrich the organization that services it. The market the RLDS faction defined to aggressively service proved not to be of sufficient size to enrich it to any substantial degree. With respect to the market for the already churchd to which it could only passively present itself, a message encumbered by apologetics and apocalyptically laced proved not to be particularly competitive.

Lacking a communitarian setting and temples within which to conduct rites "sealing" its members at different levels of perfection, "perfecting the saints" devolved into preparing oneself for citizenship in the coming Heavenly Kingdom by being above reproach of any sort among Gentiles and faction members alike. Without temples, ministering to the dead was also not a possibility. Speculation about establishing such a ministry once an RLDS temple was in fact constructed continued well into the twentieth century. However, the church for the most part had always been somewhat uncomfortable about what must have seemed a bizarre practice. By the time the RLDS temple was constructed (the early 1990s), several generations of church members had come and gone and one could just say that interest in the practice had for the most part dissipated. Thus, when the church's leadership stated that its new temple would not be used for such a purpose any protests made of that decision were inconsequential.

The impact on the RLDS version of the original church's mission of the two dynamics in play was therefore profoundly crippling. Upon inspection one finds little in this version that provides clarity of group purpose or focuses the group on what it has to do to accomplish that purpose so that it can sustain itself. The authors agree that the RLDS Church had a much more challenging task establishing itself as a viable healthy organization than did the LDS Church. Removing themselves to Utah prior to 1850, the LDS members could adhere to and prosecute their version of the ERM mission for some time, developing institutional resiliency before having to deal with serious outside interference. The RLDS Church, on the other hand, had to reinvent its mission and transform it into something effective in an entirely different setting, something that, in the opinion of the authors, it did not succeed in doing. Thus, JSIII's watch set his church's organizational trajectories, ones that persisted well into the mid-twentieth century. A perusal of the administrative biographies of two of JSIII's sons and later faction presidents, Frederick Madison Smith and Israel A. Smith, verify that claim.³⁹

³⁹ Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Fred M. Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1988), and Norma D. Hiles, *Gentle Monarch: The Presidency of Israel A. Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1991). These trajectories upon which the faction had launched itself early on did not, however, go unchallenged. See Alma D. Blair, "The Tradition of Dissent—Jason W. Briggs," *Restoration Studies I: Sesquicentennial Edition* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 146–161 and Launius, *Joseph Smith III*, chapter 12. Space does not permit treatment here of the Jason W. Briggs episode. Suffice it to say, therefore, that in the opinion of this study's authors, Briggs and Zenos Gurley, Jr., together, presented the faction with the opportunity to change its trajectory and with that the possibility

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Post 1950—The Modern Period

A number of historical and demographic factors came into play in the last half of the twentieth century that moved the RLDS Church off the trajectories on which it had been for more than a century. By the mid-twentieth century the LDS Church had gained respectability. It advocated and for the most part practiced virtues admired by non-Mormons and had disavowed many of its past practices, specifically polygamy, that had set it outside mainstream western culture making it some sort of pariah. Thus, the RLDS Church found declining interest in the case it sought to make that it was the legitimate continuation of the original church and its message to that effect became increasingly irrelevant.⁴⁰

Confidence in the theology that provided the rhetoric for the faction's message was also beginning to flag.⁴¹ The membership had become solidly a part of the middle and professional classes by this time and, with that, more educated as well.⁴² The church's theology had up to this time for the most part been propositional, legalistic, and supernatural and served primarily to buttress confidence in the claims it made about itself.⁴³ However, upon being exposed to a persuasive and compelling scientific world-view that challenged this belief system and its theological underpinnings, many who took this aspect of their RLDS heritage seriously and were resistant to discarding it could hardly avoid being obliged to rethink it.

The church's leadership had for some time hired personnel from among its lay ministry to work as full-time ministers/administrators. Understandably, the church wanted to provide these personnel some sort of orientation to insure greater effectiveness in discharging the ministerial/administrative

of installing an effective sense of organizational mission—an opportunity, for better or for worse, the faction shunned. Art Kleiner, *The Age of Heretics* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), ix–xii; Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), 29; and Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1997), 33–72, provide a good deal of insight into the episode and why the authors hold the opinion they do.

⁴⁰ Much of the RLDS faction's rhetoric in this regard was fatally compromised due to irrefutable historical evidence brought to light contradicting it by historians even within the faction itself.

⁴¹ Rhetoric here is regarded as a system of reasoned persuasive argumentation that serves as the "spin" on what an organization, in this case the RLDS Church, is about, that is, its mission. The faction's rhetoric had put a "spin" to an extensive system of interconnected theological ideas that served to argue for what the church was about and what most concerned it, and to reinforce beliefs that it had about its legitimacy as a continuation of the ERM, the legitimacy of the tradition itself, and a number of other collateral beliefs necessarily pertaining to it.

⁴² W. B. "Pat" Spillman, "Dissent and the Future of the Church," in *Let Contention Cease*, ed. Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman (Independence, Mo.: Graceland/Park Press, 1991), 267. Spillman discusses these demographic changes and their implications for the faction.

⁴³ One true church, ERM legitimacy, authoritative priesthood, gold plates, etc.

responsibilities their appointments required.⁴⁴ This orientation period was initially of one year's duration. It involved a certain amount of theological education as well in order for the faction to establish a degree of standardization and control over how it represented its theological positions to its membership and the public. For a while, the church provided a year of this orientation by enrolling new personnel in nearby Saint Paul School of Theology (Methodist) in Kansas City, Missouri.⁴⁵ Ironically, Saint Paul at the time was generally regarded by many Methodist clergy as one of the more liberal, if not the most liberal, seminaries in the domestic United Methodist seminary system.⁴⁶ Saint Paul and its sort of educational program was, however, not a problem for the faction's leadership but something familiar to be embraced.⁴⁷

The apparent backdrop that fueled and legitimized these developments was the church finding itself propelled onto the world stage with opportunities to expand its ministry beyond the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of Western Europe to third-world cultures. Engaging these cultures⁴⁸ would profoundly affect the faction.

Charles Neff, a member of the RLDS apostolic quorum who happened to be graced with a strong entrepreneurial instinct, vigorously promoted and prosecuted the faction's undertaking of these ministries, particularly to the Orient and Indian sub-continent.⁴⁹ Several motives were in play with Neff but his primary motivation was humanitarian. The poverty and lack of personal dignity with which he saw persons saddled in places throughout the world where the faction had opportunities to provide ministry deeply concerned him. He saw the faction, first and foremost, having a sacred responsibility to undertake ameliorating such human privations.

⁴⁴ W. B. Spillman, "Taking the Road More Traveled," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 24 (2004): 135-48.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Later the faction would establish its own seminary for which it currently hopes to obtain professional accreditation.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid. The membership's exposure to higher education had by this time also included undergraduate, professional, and graduate study of religion. Graduates from seminaries such as Union (New York City), Claremont and Pacific School of Theology (California), Iliff (Denver), Chicago Theological, University of Chicago, Saint Paul (Kansas City, Missouri) and non-confessional academic institutions such as Vanderbilt (Nashville, Tennessee), University of Iowa, and Florida State University became not uncommon among the faction's membership and its leadership as well. This irreversibly liberalized the understanding the faction's new ministers would have of ERM theology and its belief system and that of the RLDS variant of the ERM as well.

⁴⁸ These comprised such locations as Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, the Orient, and Africa. Particularly in the Orient these opportunities arose as the result of the United States's military engagements in the region.

⁴⁹ Matthew Bolton, *Apostle of the Poor: The Life and Work of Missionary and Humanitarian, Charles D. Neff* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2005). Bolton's recent book on Neff provides the source material for this study's discussion of Neff's role and the place of foreign missions in post-1950 developments in the RLDS faction.

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⁵⁰ Ibid., chapter

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

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Being a convert to the RLDS Church, it is for the most part acknowledged that Neff himself never had the emotional and psychological attachment to the church's "Old Jerusalem Gospel" that many lifelong members had. His "conversion" was more the result of the good fellowship he experienced in the church and not so much its theology. Thus, notions like the three levels of glory, pre-existence, the faction's legitimacy vis-à-vis the LDS Church, etc., easily paled for him in the face of the human need and misery he witnessed and to whose alleviation any confessing Christian, he believed, needed to be committed.

The RLDS Church, however, was at that time mostly an American, mid-western faith tradition. The cultural differences between it and the folk to whom it wished to direct its ministry were almost always deep-running making it often quite difficult for the faction to connect with them.⁵⁰ The answer to this dilemma, for Neff, required that the church clarify its "basic beliefs" and discard peripheral elements in its message that were otherwise incomprehensible to those belonging to non-American cultures.⁵¹ Responding to Neff's lead, the RLDS Church set itself to this task. However, in subsequently discarding these "peripheral" elements the faction began to drastically reevaluate much of what was peculiar to and distinctive about its theology given that the ERM and its spin-offs were so thoroughly American cultural expressions.

Discarding these elements stripped the RLDS theology down to an essential albeit fragmentary Christian message.⁵² Thus, many thoughtful RLDS leaders and intellectuals at this time began exploring various theological and philosophical systems in order to reconstitute the church's theology into a more complete and comprehensive message of mainstream but decidedly liberal Christian thought.⁵³ Their efforts contributed many valuable insights and ideas that helped to shape and inform new perspectives for the faction to have about itself. It is, however, unclear that any coherent comprehensive system ever emerged from these efforts, but rather they served more to further marginalize those "peripheral" elements of the church's inherited belief system. As a result, the church's leadership and much of its membership became invariably and increasingly disposed toward abandoning the faction's initial but severely compromised sense of organizational mission that had already left it incapable of effectively differentiating itself from other like organizations.

Responding to the spirit of "interpret[ing] the Zionite concept for our day," the RLDS Church also undertook the more conservative task of recasting

⁵⁰ Ibid., chapter 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ During this time sampling from, for example, a veritable theological and philosophical smorgasbord was widespread, including neo-orthodoxy, process theology, theology of hope, existentialism, and secular humanism. Significantly, however, work done in theology as well as history took on a scholarly tone being subject to peer review in evaluating the quality of such effort.

revered and fabled elements of ERM theology, its so-called "RLDS Distinctives," in a contemporary context that would be palatable to its membership.⁵⁴ It seemed logical to assume that the results of such efforts could have the effect of recovering the kind of energy and drive that had characterized the early movement's undertakings because these restatements would existentially reconnect the membership to a past to which it belonged and was basically loyal.⁵⁵ It is not clear, however, to what extent this undertaking ever achieved any traction. Diligent and dedicated faction members undertook and continue to undertake their task often with great skill and their results are often provocative and inspiring. Nevertheless, having only the inherited framework of a compromised and partial sense of organizational mission by which to integrate these results into a coherent rhetorical system, the message such results could convey is uncertain and risks being not much more than curious nostalgic exercises. Coupled to an also-inherited culture of organizational unity that does not run deep, such nostalgia could and sometimes did prove only to be controversial as well.

The faction has made other attempts to reinvent itself in ways that could prove productive, albeit more drastic. Section 156 (1984) of the faction's Doctrine and Covenants notes two: the decision to ordain women to its ministry and the dedication of its temple to the pursuit of peace. Both policies constitute breaks with the church's ERM past and its own in 1) recognizing that the exclusion of women from its ministry was indefensibly grounded in a cultural vogue long past and 2) permanently dispensing with any further speculation whatsoever that arcane rites might be a part of temple activities. Women with the additional input of their perspectives now populate all the church's ministerial quorums,

⁵⁴ Bolton, *Apostle of the Poor*, 49.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Paul A. Wellington, ed., *Readings on Concepts of Zion* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1973), *Exploring the Faith* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1970), *The Storehouse Principle and Its Implementation in the Stakes of Zion* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1971), and recent (2007) articles in the *Herald* on the church's sacraments. *Concepts of Zion* was a compilation of articles expressing various views, some quite staid and traditional, and others progressive in their treatment of the Zionite theme and its place in current RLDS theology of that time. *Exploring the Faith* was a project undertaken that was quite consistent with an important passage found in the Doctrine and Covenants, the church's compilation of contemporary revelations: "Many of you have sought security in the words and phrases by which the faithful of earlier days have expressed their knowledge of me....My servants...must also [now] bring to their searching for truth and service to my people all the treasures of understanding I have opened for them elsewhere" (D&C 149:4). It explicitly attempted to restate much of the RLDS Church beliefs and ERM heritage in a contemporary context with which the membership would hopefully connect. With respect to *The Storehouse Principle*, some might assert that the faction has in fact implemented the "Storehouse Principle" in the form of the many food pantries, etc., the membership has been instrumental in establishing. Others might regard this as being a bit of a stretch since such implementations did not originate with the faction or the ERM for that matter and their end is something different than the end intended by the "Storehouse." More recently, the 2007 *Herald* articles represent a continuation of this tradition.

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even its apostolic quorum and First Presidency, and the temple serves as a valuable tool for promoting refined, more sophisticated, and focused images of itself the faction wishes to project.

In 2001 the church also changed its name to Community of Christ. Such a change the authors believe constitutes a constructive attempt to psychologically break with a past in which the faction too often defined itself in terms of what it was not—the LDS faction. Organizations that habitually present themselves as negative counterparts of something else invariably expend themselves on unproductive pursuits and thus rarely function effectively. Moreover, having always identified itself as a Christian organization, the name change draws attention to where the church should most likely be directing its attention and possibly in the context of its communitarian heritage.⁵⁶

The Community of Christ now also defines itself as a “Peace” church with its one temple dedicated to lending to that descriptor symbolic and functional plausibility. While there are organizational precedents for successfully replacing organizational missions,⁵⁷ it might be a bit simplistic, however, to think that that an organization that in all likelihood never had a sense of organizational mission can therefore at some point in time establish clarity of group purpose. Nevertheless, the attempt to clarify group purpose, and with that establishing a rudimentary sense of organizational mission, may well be under way with the faction. It is, however, not all that clear to the authors as to what the church currently means by “peace.”⁵⁸ The faction, therefore, must eventually and sufficiently clarify how it understands this term so that it can derive suitable implications from that understanding for the kind of programming it will then be called upon to sustain. Otherwise, what the church does will have little legitimacy, how it desires to understand itself will have little plausibility, and it will have little chance of actualizing coherent clarity of purpose among its membership in order to engage its sentiments.

⁵⁶ How one understands “community” in the church’s new name is crucial practically. If the term is simply a substitute for the word “church” regardless as to how sophisticated and erudite “church” might be understood, the faction will most likely find it difficult to differentiate itself from other like organizations. If on the other hand the faction understands “community” in communitarian terms and does so contemporaneously as it has been directed to do, this can facilitate it being able to differentiate itself constructively from other like organizations if done with care.

⁵⁷ Organizations have had success changing their missions. A notable example is with the March of Dimes organization when with the eradication of polio it chose to retool itself in order to pursue eradicating birth defects.

⁵⁸ Peace is more than the absence of conflict, and peace movements thus should not limit themselves only to repudiating conflict—a pacifist strategy. If peace is understood more as beneficial collaborations, then conflict in a world of grays is something to be embraced as part of a dialectical process whereby such collaborations are evolving phenomena. This sort of strategy is proactive because it ameliorates the possibility of such conflict evolving into something more destructive than it already might have become. Outreach International, established by Charles Neff, is an example of the application of this sort of strategy.

Section 163 (2007), a document included in the church's Doctrine and Covenants, appears to decisively move in the direction of attempting to provide the needed clarification as to how the faction should understand what the mission of being a peace church in the world is. Regarded as a potential seminal document, it is receiving a great deal of attention. Recent issues of the *Herald* (the general publication to its membership) contain paragraph by paragraph analyses of this document. It is clear that the church's leadership think that it is well worth the effort to familiarize the general membership with and educate them about Section 163. Where this attention will lead is too early to say. Nevertheless, one can recognize, given this document's contents, the substance out of which one fashions organizational missions.

The faction appears to have so far failed to reframe the ERM's mission in a way that would effectively position it within the gentile communities. Since it may no longer care to try to do that, formal mission statements the church has recently formulated are of interest and are worthy of a preliminary critique: a 1985 version and a later version that now appears on the faction's website (www.cofchrist.org).⁵⁹ The early mission statement was accompanied by a vision statement.⁶⁰

Inspecting these mission statements discloses little that is reminiscent of the Community of Christ's ERM heritage but it is not clear to what extent they permit the faction to differentiate itself from organizations of like purpose. In lieu of an informal understanding on the part of the organization's members, vision statements can provide some specificity as to the intent of the mission statements to which they are attached. Unfortunately, there appears to be

⁵⁹ The 1985 statement reads: "We are the body of Christ. His spirit leads us to proclaim the gospel. The purpose of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is to help families and congregations develop the likeness of Christ in each person. Such congregations seek to continue Christ's ministries. We embrace an unconditional love for all and seek with them a faithful relationship with God. Our congregations thus become witnesses to God's redeeming presence in the world. Led by continuing prophetic direction, we affirm truth, embrace all persons as being of inherent worth, and teach a life of stewardship. We invite everyone to join us in seeking a life reconciled to God, who brings assurance to today and hope for tomorrow." See Leonard M. Young, ed., *Church Administrator's Handbook* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1995), 7.

The most recent website version of the mission statement is simply: "We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace." See www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/mission.asp.

⁶⁰ The Vision Statement for the 1985 version reads: "We believe that the future belongs to God and that the promise of God's kingdom shall be fulfilled. We have a vision of that kingdom where Jesus Christ is truly honored, where God's will is done on earth, where the hungry are fed, poverty is alleviated, sinners are repentant, and sin is forgiven. We believe that love is the proper foundation of our relationship with others, that opportunity to grow in the likeness Christ should be fostered, and that the resources of the world can be managed to respect and preserve their creation and purpose. We have a vision of a time when all evil is overcome and peace prevails. Impelled by this vision, we will be an international community of prophetic vision, faithful to the risen Christ, empowered by hope, spending ourselves courageously in the pursuit of peace and justice." See Young, *Church Administrator's Handbook*, 7.

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little in these statements that provides the specificity required to establish the church's differentiability. The authors have done a preliminary critique of the church's mission statements but until they can establish the presence or absence of connections to programming, resource allocation, targeted markets, etc., pronouncements as to whether or not these statements (be they well or poorly written) actually constitute bona fide mission statements would be premature.⁶¹ Nevertheless, if such connections do exist, the authors do not sense that the church's membership is particularly aware of them. That in itself practically trumps any claims one could make that such statements are bona fide statements of mission. Contrast this ambiguity with the LDS mission.

Preaching the gospel, perfecting the saints, and ministering to the dead by themselves are certainly abstract concepts. Yet, most LDS members have a clear idea of what those concepts concretely mean in terms of the programming the church has in place to reify them. When logical connections are precarious or simply do not exist between the allocations of organizational resources and what the organization says it is about as a way of differentiating itself from other like organizations, an organization most likely will be incapable of effectively legitimating what it does and, in what it does, incapable of definitively clarifying what it is about. An organization in such a situation is, frankly, on a random walk through time subject to the whims and fancies of those who have access to the levers of power that control the organization.⁶² To whatever extent this is and continues to be the case with the Community of Christ much depends on whether or not it can forge a consensus as to how it reifies its mission statement and provides it definitive content. Otherwise, a formal mission statement will

⁶¹ The authors have completed a preliminary analysis comparing the formal statements of the RLDS/CofChrist and informal statement of the LDS. They defer, however, at this time from including this analysis with this study until it is more thorough.

⁶² Bolton, *Apostle of the Poor*, 104-107, provides a case in point of the unnecessary organizational stresses that can otherwise arise. Conflict between the RLDS apostolic quorum and Presiding Bishopric arose over the quorum's desire to have at its disposal discretionary funds to conduct work in the Orient and Third World that Neff was promoting. The Bishopric who had exclusive control over the allocation of church resources was not about to relinquish any of its control. Only after some administrative restructuring occurred was that exclusive control wrested from the Bishopric. No doubt the need for such discretionary funds was legitimate and efficacious results followed as the result of their expenditure. Nevertheless, one can make several inter-related observations of a strategic nature from this incident. First, without a coherent sense of organizational mission, what had transpired was occasional. The flirtation with the Orient and the Third World could have been merely "whimsy" and part of a "random walk." Thus, the most persuasive belligerent will carry the day. Yet, with a coherent sense of organizational mission all this would have been unnecessary. The LDS faction for example, would hardly debate whether or not to build temples only where, when, and how big. If the RLDS Church had a coherent sense of mission that endorsed such undertakings as the quorum was advocating, the issue might have arisen as to how it might spend its discretionary fund but not whether or not it should have any funds to spend. Without a sense of organizational mission, domains of power and control emerge within an organization that come into conflict with each other more on the basis of maintaining or extending their domains rather than coordinating the execution of their responsibilities to accomplish purposes at the organizational level.

most likely devolve into not much more than some sort of public relations tool, mantra, or slogan.

Part Five: Performance Analysis

The authors have suggested that an effective sense of mission should make it possible for an organization to flourish, while lacking such a sense of mission would most likely cause it to founder. To support such a presumption, the authors compared the growth rates of the membership of each faction. The appendix presents the results of this analysis. The data set selected for both organizations consists of annual membership data from 1891 to 2003.⁶³ The LDS membership data from 1891 to 2003 exhibits a rather stable⁶⁴ annual percentage growth rate of 3.546 percent.⁶⁵ Such a rate acts like compound interest. Consequently, the growth rate in the actual number of the membership from year to year is not constant but increases exponentially (see appendix). The RLDS/Community of Christ membership data from 1891 to 2003, however, exhibits constant annual *number* growth which a straight line best approximates.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it would be useful for comparative purposes if some sort of annual percentage growth rate for it could be devised in order to make a comparison between LDS and RLDS growth rates more meaningful. The rate at which a percentage growth rate compounds in a linear system must necessarily decline.⁶⁷ Taking this decline into account, the faction's initial growth rate of 1.04712 percent declines to a final estimated growth rate of 1.02075 percent exhibiting an

⁶³ The data sets were obtained from the factions' respective archives. LDS data extended back into the first half of the nineteenth century. However, the RLDS data go back only to 1891. With well over one-hundred observations in the RLDS data set (a degrees-of-freedom consideration) and the possible advantages that can obtain from comparing data sets of equal length, the authors decided to drop from the analysis LDS data prior to 1891.

⁶⁴ The LDS faction's data set and estimate generates a MAPE (mean absolute percentage error) of 1.223%.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that these figures for either organization do not reflect their active memberships or their respective levels of activity either. More refined performance measures are required which the closing section of this study addresses.

⁶⁶ Linear regression is the technique explaining 99%+ of the variation in growth by adding a net average of 2190 persons to the membership annually with a mean absolute percentage error of 3.6568, only 0.11 percent more than the LDS faction.

⁶⁷ A simple example illustrates this problem. Adding net gain of 5,000 members to a membership base of 20,000 at the beginning of the first period yields a growth of 25 percent in the first period. Add another net gain of 5,000 members to a membership base of 25,000 at the beginning of the second period yields now a growth rate of 20 percent for the second period. Obviously this is a very simplistic example. Nevertheless even if the membership exceeds the initial base by only a little the percentage rate of growth will have necessarily declined.

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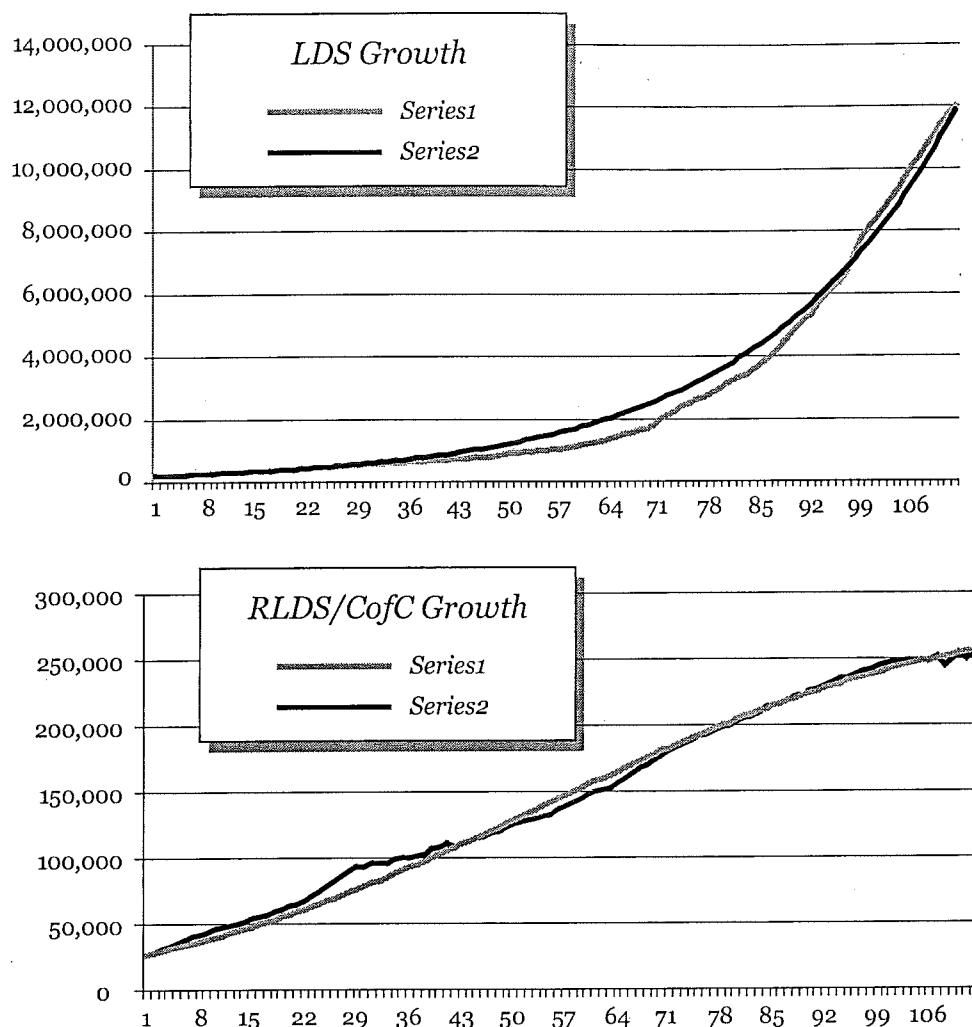
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Relative growth trends of the LDS Church and the RLDS/Community of Christ. See appendix for membership data.

annual compounding rate of decline of 0.02277 percent. At the same time the faction exhibits substantially less growth stability than the LDS faction.⁶⁸

The authors stress that the above comparison is only *preliminary*. Using a univariate time series type approach as was done here, one does not control for various factors that might impact growth rates (e.g., family size, socioeconomic status, and education level). Also, factors other than growth might

⁶⁸ The RLDS/CofChrist data set and estimate generates a MAPE (mean absolute percentage error) of 5.126 percent.

also be appropriate measures of organizational vitality.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, a simple analysis of organizational growth rates is certainly a good place to start when comparing organizational performances.

Part Six: Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Comparative Observations

The authors have throughout this study advanced the notion that a positive relationship exists between organizational vitality and sense of mission. Organizations founder without clarity of group purpose and the focus of its members on what they must do to accomplish that purpose so that it can hold its membership and thus sustain itself. Clarity of group purpose is about a set of shared beliefs as to what the organization is in the business of doing, to which its membership can for the most part ascribe. Focusing the membership on what it must do to accomplish that purpose has to do with how to make that set of beliefs operational. In so doing, an organization sustains itself because it creates a reality of order and meaning for its membership whereby its beliefs are made plausible by what it does, and what it does is legitimated by what it believes.⁷⁰ The authors' sense is that the LDS Church has managed to accomplish this construction of reality for its membership and so as an organization has been able to sustain itself and to even flourish rather dramatically while the RLDS Church/Community of Christ has not.

One must admit, however, in fairness to the RLDS faction, its task of being or making itself into a vital organization was far more difficult than it was for the LDS faction. The latter was able to isolate itself from the greater "Gentile" community for almost half a century before interacting with it became unavoidable. By that time its organizational culture had become sufficiently resilient to maintain its organizational integrity in terms of what it had been and for the most part still was in spite of many external pressures brought against it designed to compromise that integrity. Having isolation and time, the faction gradually found ways to prosecute and for the most part remain committed to its established mission both adaptively and proactively in the gentile settings in which it now finds itself as its ability to isolate itself finally evaporated with the passage of time.

Such was not the case for the RLDS Church. From its beginning it was for the most part embedded and dispersed throughout gentile communities and sought to make the relationships that ensued with those communities amicable. Thus, to make the belief system it inherited from the ERM and much of which it shared in common with the LDS faction operational, was not practical.

⁶⁹ The RLDS Church/Community of Christ itself, however, regards growth as a "critical success factor" whatever that might mean (see footnote 60).

⁷⁰ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, section 1.

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It could have wrestled with making its belief system plausible in ways that might have constructively related its membership in terms of a mission to the new vastly different settings in which it found itself. Apparently, however, the faction's leadership did not have a sufficient understanding of the dynamics that it in large part created or endorsed that came into play both within and outside the faction and worked to its detriment by stymieing useful faction creativity. What, therefore, may instead have been the more critical and pressing concern for the RLDS Church at that time was not so much constructively reinventing itself but just managing to survive as an organization which sadly was not the faction's fundamental problem.⁷¹ It remains to be seen whether the Community of Christ will now have the understanding and managerial skill to successfully reinvent itself (frame an effective mission) by which it can then realize more organizationally productive future ventures.

Some Remaining Questions

This study raises several unaddressed issues. Additional performance measures, some of which are idiosyncratic to each organization need to be identified and tied to organizational missions where possible. This will add inductive strength to conclusions drawn in answer to the fundamental question that instigated this research in the first place. One early RLDS effort to reinvent itself is intriguing, instructive, and deserving of more attention.⁷² Study of the LDS experience in the Basin and how it "reinvented" itself to some extent in order to accommodate itself to its remote setting and also as it began to integrate itself into the national gentile community deserves attention as well.⁷³ Finally, does the LDS experience and the strategic management literature in general provide the Community of Christ useful insights for the present as to how it might effectively reinvent itself? Such an undertaking for the Community of Christ would entail establishing an understood and ascribed-to group purpose whose reification could sustain and give the organization and its membership coherence. How the church might accomplish such an undertaking (recover, establish, or redirect its sense of mission) is particularly instructive since many organizations from time to time are so tasked.

⁷¹ Early on, being able to at least languish may have unfortunately been seen as the RLDS faction's only viable option given its circumstances.

⁷² Some twenty years after the RLDS faction's founding, Jason W. Briggs and Zenos Gurley Jr. challenged the course on which the faction had embarked. The authors believe that these two persons were the locus of a potentially pivotal moment in the life of the RLDS faction that possibly might have inaugurated the charting of a more productive course of action than what otherwise turned out to be the case.

⁷³ It could provide a case study of the so-called agile and proactive/reactive organization that hardly ever lost sight of its mission when it came to making both effective strategic and tactical decisions.

Appendix—Membership Data

Non-integer entries are interpolations due to lack of data points.

YEAR	LDS	RLDS/CofC	YEAR	LDS	RLDS/CofC
1891	195,445	25,638	1930	670,017	106,140
1892	200,961	26,706	1931	688,435	108,431
1893	214,534	28,526	1932	703,949	110,614
1894	222,369	30,489	1933	717,619	108,276
1895	231,116	32,889	1934	730,738	110,502
1896	241,427	34,814	1935	746,384	112,831
1897	255,736	38,370	1936	760,690	114,758
1898	267,251	40,639	1937	767,752	116,672
1899	271,681	41,958	1938	784,764	118,471
1900	283,765	43,824	1939	803,528	120,896
1901	292,931	45,381	1940	862,664	123,230
1902	299,105	46,954	1941	892,080	125,244
1903	304,901	48,737	1942	917,715	127,087
1904	324,289	50,330	1943	937,050	128,659
1905	332,048	51,853	1944	954,004	130,024
1906	345,014	53,781	1945	979,454	131,360
1907	357,913	55,045	1946	996,505	132,545
1908	371,472	57,365	1947	1,015,170	136,167
1909	377,279	59,256	1948	1,041,970	138,532
1910	398,478	60,906	1949	1,078,671	141,433
1911	407,291	63,090	1950	1,111,314	144,463
1912	417,555	65,415	1951	1,147,157	147,355
1913	431,607	68,211	1952	1,189,053	149,989
1914	454,718	71,702	1953	1,246,362	151,419.5
1915	466,238	73,899	1954	1,302,240	152,850
1916	477,321	78,326	1955	1,357,274	156,440
1917	488,038	82,964	1956	1,416,731	159,996
1918	495,962	86,260	1957	1,488,314	163,691
1919	507,961	90,825	1958	1,555,799	167,277
1920	525,987	92,746	1959	1,616,088	170,770
1921	548,803	93,866	1960	1,693,180	174,479
1922	566,358	95,496	1961	1,823,661	177,551
1923	575,896	95,363	1962	1,965,786	180,700
1924	597,831	95,815	1963	2,117,451	183,287
1925	613,572	98,092	1964	2,234,916	185,997
1926	623,909	99,466	1965	2,395,932	188,610
1927	644,745	100,500	1966	2,480,899	191,407
1928	655,686	101,331.5	1967	2,614,340	193,286
1929	663,652	102,163	1968	2,684,073	196,512

YEAR	LDS	RLDS/CofC	YEAR	LDS	RLDS/CofC
1969	2,807,456	198,464	1987	6,394,314	238,224
1970	2,930,810	200,113	1988	6,721,210	240,149
1971	3,090,953	202,675	1989	7,308,444	242,300
1972	3,218,908	205,307	1990	7,761,179	244,186
1973	3,306,657	207,178	1991	8,089,843	245,413
1974	3,409,987	209,298	1992	8,404,087	246,889
1975	3,572,202	213,399	1993	8,689,619	247,151
1976	3,742,749	215,204	1994	9,025,914	248,431
1977	3,969,220	216,888	1995	9,340,450	248,796
1978	4,166,854	218,630	1996	9,693,980	249,232
1979	4,404,121	221,016	1997	10,072,207	249,224
1980	4,639,822	223,539	1998	10,400,000	250,926
1981	4,920,449	225,650	1999	10,752,986	243,995
1982	5,162,619	227,549	2000	11,068,861	249,888
1983	5,351,724	230,103	2001	11,394,522	253,836
1984	5,641,054	232,026	2002	11,721,548	249,763
1985	5,919,483	234,620	2003	11,985,254	255,830
1986	6,166,974	235,807			