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Deseret Book and Herald House:
Language Features as Expressions of LDS and RLDS Divergences

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During the approximately 140 years since the main body of Mormons moved westward and settled in the valleys of the Great Basin, many factors have served to separate the Utah group from others with a similar heritage and name. This has been true, in particular, for those who, remaining in the Midwest, coalesced to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the second largest of the groups which claim descent from Joseph Smith and his teachings. At various times the factions have been distinguished doctrinally, organizationally, culturally, and in other ways. However, one very interesting distinguishing feature has been neglected--that of language. Yet the language of the two groups takes in many of the other characteristics and shows perhaps as well as anything else how much these two groups differ and in which areas.

As many have pointed out, one of the most compelling problems for all the Mormons during the nineteenth century was to create an acceptable cultural identity. The Utah church did this by isolating itself geographically as well as psychologically in order to build its own version of the "Kingdom of God." Despite an ever-decreasing isolation, this "Kingdom" mentality lasted well into the twentieth century, allowing the church to develop its unique cultural patterns relatively undisturbed.

On the other hand, there were numbers of members who remained behind in various of the places in which the church had built earlier, such as Kirtland, Ohio; Nauvoo, Illinois; and Independence Missouri, and for these people, the challenge was to try to develop a unique identity within the confines and despite the interference of other, often hostile, Christian groups. At the same time, this identity also had to be created with relation, and at times in response, to the culture which was evolving in the West, that of the largest group of Mormons, who considered themselves the only legitimate group to carry on the work started by Joseph Smith. Clare D. Vlahos points out that:

the Reorganized Church's identity problem was not caused by an inability to be convincing in its claims. Nor was it primarily a case of internally synthesizing diverse elements into a homogeneous belief structure. Rather, in building an identity the Reorganization did so in relation to two sometimes conflicting external influences. It wished to be reasonable to gentiles and legitimate to Mormons. It stumbled because it could not always be both.

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However, despite this statement, in many ways the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has, in fact, blended both Mormon and gentile, and specifically Protestant, cultures in its orientation to Christianity, so that it has, indeed, created its own identity, somewhere halfway between the two. This is particularly evident in the language used in its in-group written materials.

From the very beginning of Mormonism, one of the most important concepts was that of the priesthood. The basic offices were spelled out by Joseph Smith in *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and they have remained fairly constant in both the Utah and Missouri groups ever since. However, quite a number of additions have been made as the organizations have grown and as circumstances have changed, so that now there are considerable differences in certain areas. One minor difference is in spelling. Just as the Utah group spells its name The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as opposed to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, so the Utah spelling for the higher priesthood is Melchizedek, while the Reorganization spells the name Melchisedec.

Other differences are more substantial. Although both priesthood organizations have a First Presidency and a Council of Twelve, the Reorganization also has the Standing High Council, which has jurisdiction in some policy and judicial matters (*The Priesthood* 35). The office which the Utah church refers to as a patriarch is also called evangelist by the Reorganization. Although Melchizedek and Aaronic are used in common, the Utah church generally calls them priesthoods, while the Reorganization says orders. Differences also arise because of the fact that in the Utah church the offices of the Aaronic priesthood have become those conferred upon young men from the ages of twelve to eighteen or nineteen, and consequently they do not carry as much prestige as they do in the Reorganization, where those offices are filled by adults and carry more specific ecclesiastical responsibilities. This is one of the areas in which the Reorganization has moved closer to mainstream Protestantism than to Utah Mormonism.

Related changes in terminology which also bring the Reorganization closer to Protestantism have to do with the functions of the priesthood within the group. For example, the 1982 edition of *The Priesthood Manual* states that:

Thoughtful consideration of the gospel shows . . . that our ministry is not only a call to communicate knowledge but also to be witnesses of divine grace. . . . In a real sense the priesthood member must become the embodiment of Divine Grace. . . . Skill in ministry, however, will also require actual pastoral care of members of the church and nonmembers. As priesthood members seek to qualify for ministry their training programs will . . . be in conjunction with actual ministry. (17-18)

Since the Utah church avoids such terms as ministry, pastoral or pastor, and grace, it is clear that this is one of the areas in which the Reorganization has developed in a different direction. On the other hand, discussions of the priesthood as the "legal authority to represent God," and the "authority to . . . bring about the kingdom of God on earth" (*The Priesthood* 28) show the original and continued relationship of Reorganization doctrines with those of the Utah church.

It is interesting to note that some of the divergences in terminology between the two groups occurred as early as the Nauvoo period. Those members who ultimately coalesced into the Reorganization repudiated the actions of the Nauvoo period of church history: the institution of polygamy as well as the doctrines of baptism for the dead, the gathering, and the endowment (Vlahos 180). Naturally, the terminology associated with these activities is absent from the Reorganization vocabulary, but important in that of the Utah church. Another term which arose in the Nauvoo period and so is unique to the Utah church is ward as a term for the local geographical and ecclesiastical unit. The comparable term in the Reorganization is congregation. On the other hand, the term stake came into use in the Kirtland period, the era accepted as doctrinally

valid by the Reorganization, and so the term is used by both groups. Similarly, conference, president as the leader of a stake, bishop, and high council, are common terms, although not always with similar denotations. A Reorganization bishop, for example, is a stake or regional officer, rather than a congregation leader, while the person who leads the local group is usually a pastor or minister, as is also true in Protestantism. One area in which the terminology is quite different in the Reorganization is that dealing with people who serve as proselytizers. Whereas the Utah church uses the term missionary, sometimes with a qualifier such as work, or health, the Reorganization uses a qualified descriptive phrase: Young Adult Two-year Contractual Assignee, Retired Person Contractual Assignee, Term Contractual Assignee. Both groups use the term field, although the Utah church primarily uses it to refer to specific areas of missionary activity, while the Reorganization employs it in a more general sense of any region overseen by an apostle. However, there is a considerable amount of ambiguity in the use of the term for both groups. Other organizational terms, of course, have entered the vocabulary of each groups independently in the intervening years, some of them similar. Both groups, for example, have districts and regions, although the geographical boundaries indicated by the terms are not always similar.

Besides priesthood and structural terms, many others show the great cultural differences between the Reorganization and the Utah church. Again, some of these stem from the Nauvoo period. For example, the accepted scriptures of the Utah group are called the Standard Works, or the Four Standard Works, while those of the Reorganization are the Three Standard Books, The Pearl of Great Price having been given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. The traditional name of the health code, the Word of Wisdom, although belonging to the Kirtland period, is not accepted as scripture by the Reorganization, because the Doctrine and Covenants itself states that it is "not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom" (89: 2). However, guidelines have been accepted regarding the use of intoxicants and tobacco which contain an interesting mixture of Mormon and Protestant terminology:

This conference deprecates the use of intoxicating drinks (as beverages), and the use of tobacco, and recommends, to all officers of the church, total abstinence.

The addiction to tobacco is clearly a detriment to the physical and spiritual life of a Christian steward, although such addiction of itself is not a test of membership in the church. (*The Priesthood* 60-61)

Other cultural patterns, also belonging to the Nauvoo period, are different in the Reorganization as well, usually more like those of the orthodox Protestants. The Relief Society was organized and named by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, and has endured, although not without problems or changes, in Utah Mormonism ever since. On the other hand, in the Reorganization, there has been no enduring general church organization addressing itself to the needs and problems of women, and both terminology and ideology are much closer to Protestantism. One women's leader, for example, stated that, "Everything must be done under the eye of an elder. . . . I protest such an idea" (Cassie B. Kelley qtd. in Goodyear 245). Arguments for the participation of women in the priesthood, as is now common in a number of Protestant churches, are summarized by Goodyear as well, and they incorporate much non-Mormon terminology. (247).

The most noticeable linguistic differences between Utah Mormonism and the Reorganization, however, are in language dealing with those cultural patterns which developed after the move to the Great Basin. Terminology for the youth programs, the

Primary, the Sunday School is all, in some ways, unique to Utah Mormonism, and is not shared by the Missouri group, which is, in these areas, again closer to Protestantism in its use of general terms such as church school. Doctrinal terminology also solidified after the division, so most doctrinal phraseology is either very similar or very different, depending on whether the doctrine, with its specific terms, was accepted before or after the split. If it was instituted before 1844, the language is probably quite similar, whereas after 1844 the language of the Utah church shows the result of its long isolation in the West, while that of the Reorganization shows the influence of its Protestant surroundings. Just as the language associated with priesthood offices is a good example of the former, that linked with the various ordinances and worship activities demonstrates very well the latter.

One of the areas in which Utah Mormon terminology differs considerably from that of the rest of Christianity is in the manner of referring to sacraments. The Utah church accepts only one sacrament, that which most Protestants call the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. The meeting in which this ritual takes place is called Sacrament Meeting, showing the significance of the activity. In the Reorganization, however, as in most Protestant terminologies, as well as that of the Roman Catholics, a number of rituals and ordinances are called sacraments. "The sacraments are an extension of the ministry of incarnation in which God uses human nature and material things to express himself tangibly in humankind" (*The Priesthood* 205). Not only is the difference in the use of the word sacraments evident in this passage, but also other words which are not a common part of the religious vocabulary of Utah Mormonism, but are very much a part of Protestantism: ministry and incarnation, as well as the idea of God expressing himself tangibly in mankind. Another statement shows an interesting mixture of Mormon and Protestant language and actions: "The sacraments . . . include baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper, blessing of children, ordination, administering to the sick, marriage, and patriarchal blessing" (*The Priesthood* 208). Both the use of sacraments and the Lord's Supper reflect Protestant usage, while the blessing of children rather than christening them, administering to the sick, and patriarchal blessing are typical Mormon terms.

The ordinances themselves also show this mixture of Mormon and Protestant influences. The recommended Reorganization wording for the prayer of confirmation, for example, is, "We your brethren, having been commissioned by Jesus Christ, place our hands upon your head to confirm you and ask God to grant the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this act we extend to you membership in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" (*The Priesthood* 219). Utah Mormons would find no fault with the first phrases, but would add a statement about the priesthood authority of the speaker, and would command the candidate to "receive the Holy Ghost," rather than asking God to grant the gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, instructions for conducting Communion services include: "Elements of the service include a short message, scripture reading, a pastoral exhortation, prayer, and the blessing and serving of the Lord's Supper. It includes an oblation offering for the poor and needy" (*The Priesthood* 226). Since the sacrament is a part of the weekly worship service in the Utah church, instructions for special services are unnecessary, and certainly they would not include a pastoral exhortation nor an oblation offering. Both of those terms are more appropriately Protestant.

One particular sacrament is very different in the Reorganization than in the Utah church--marriage. The Utah church has always considered the proper marriage to be one solemnized in a temple "for time and all eternity," and quite an extensive vocabulary has grown up around that concept and practice. However, that is clearly not appropriate in the Reorganization:

Marriage in the church is considered a lifelong commitment as indicated by the phrase "during your lives" which is required as a part of each wedding ceremony in the church. . . . Prior to Joseph Smith's death in 1844 speculation regarding the eternal nature of marriage was present within the church. Suffice it to say that the Reorganized Church has always rejected the view that marriage covenants are valid after death.

(*The Priesthood* 243)

Because of this rejection, the terminology surrounding marriage and the family in the Reorganization are very close to those of orthodox Protestantism.

Another important area also shows much closer ties with Protestantism than with Utah Mormonism: the terminology for the physical accommodations.

Most worship sanctuaries are arranged to facilitate an observer role by the congregation rather than a participant role; rows of fixed pews are arranged so the worshiper sees the minister, the chancel, and, sometimes, the choir. In recent years, there has been an attempt to eliminate the problem of looking at the backs of people's heads by arranging the sanctuary "in the round," where the seats complete a full circle around the chancel or altar.

(Maurice Draper qtd. by *The Priesthood* 136)

Here, words such as sanctuary and chancel are definitely not used by Utah Mormons, nor minister, of course, and altar would also be questionable. Utah Mormons would speak of the chapel, the stand, and perhaps the choirloft, quite a distinct set of terms.

It is clear, then, that the Utah branch of Mormonism and that of the Reorganization share a good many doctrines and practices, as well as the terminology to deal with them. However, there are also far-reaching differences. As Vlahos points out, in the early days of the Reorganization:

It was important . . . to be accepted by gentile culture and for that reason an image of propriety and decorum was part of its apologetics. . . . It was particularly important for Joseph III to redeem his father's name and for the church to gain federal recognition of differences between the Reorganized and Utah churches, both for removal of penalties and for the sake of image.

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Thus, the Reorganization deliberately began the repudiation of the events and practices, not only of Nauvoo and later periods in church history, but even of some of the happenings of Kirtland, such as the Kirtland banking scheme. At the same time, it had to distinguish itself from the Protestantism of the surrounding population, and it did so primarily through "the presence of the six principles of the gospel, the New testament officers, and the gifts of the Spirit" (Vlahos 180). All of these had to be stated in clear language, and so a new terminology emerged, originally taken from early Mormon sources, but incorporating the language of the orthodox Protestants in order not to appear threatening to them. In the meantime, the Utah group, growing in relative peace and isolation, was also developing its own cultural patterns that required expression. Now, over one hundred years later, those differences in language are perhaps the clearest indication of the true distinctions between the two groups.