As the enemies of honest men and women governed by the rule of law, such secret combinations seek to subvert public virtue and legally constituted authority. They defile, defraud, murder, deceive, and destroy the elements of good government, religious or secular. Their goal is to seize power and to rule over all the people (3 Ne. 6:27–30), which results in the destruction of human freedom and agency and the paralysis of peaceful and just communities.

Secret combinations and their practices have a scriptural and historic tradition that extends from the days of Cain’s secret covenant with Satan to modern times. Members of these Satanic combinations are bound by secret oaths and covenants. The devil proclaims, initiates, and sustains these combinations and their conspiratorial practices (Moses 5:29–33, 47–52).

In the Book of Mormon, several secret combinations challenged governments ruled by the “voice of the people” or by righteous kings. They were a continuing threat to the Jaredites, who succumbed eventually to their power. Later, they were a threat to the Nephite and Lamanite nations when the Gadianton combinations, over a period of many years, challenged the constituted authorities and eventually seized power. The concerted effort of the whole populace later defeated the Gadiantons, but others rose in their place. The Book of Mormon details the tactics and strategies of the Gadiantons, mentions a variety of countermeasures, and shows that a secret combination was responsible for the final downfall of the Nephites (Hel. 2:13–14; Ether 8:21; see also Book of Mormon: Helaman and Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi).

In the contemporary world, secret combinations take various forms and operate at different levels of society. They are expressed in organized crime and in religious, economic, and political conspiracies. The Lord has warned that secret combinations will be present in modern society (D&C 38:29; Ether 8:20–25). They threaten freedom everywhere. However, Latter-day Saints believe that secret combinations and their practices can be overcome, but only through righteous living and full support of honest government.

Secret combinations are often referred to in latter-day scripture, particularly in the book of Moses and the Book of Mormon. In the Doctrine and Covenants, this term describes those who have conspired against the Saints (D&C 42:64). It does not appear in the Bible, but the equivalent “conspiracy” is used at least ten times.

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SECT

In ordinary usage the word “sect” refers to any body of followers or adherents, ranging from the main religions of the world to small groups of heretics. “Sect” derives from the Latin sequi, to follow. In sociological terminology, a sect is a separately organized religious group that meets specified criteria. Technically, this term does not adequately describe The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As defined by social scientists, three criteria are central in determining whether a religious group is a sect: (1) it is organizationally simple; (2) it stands in high tension with the dominant society (typically because sect members view themselves as a “faithful remnant” of the pure religion that has been rejected by society); and (3) it views itself as uniquely legitimate, the sole source of salvation. Applying these criteria to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not always easy. With respect to these factors, the organizational structure of the LDS Church is obviously complex and international in scope. While the nineteenth-century commitment to building a literal political and economic kingdom and the practice of plural marriage placed the LDS Church in tension with its host societies, neither of these practices sociologically characterize the twentieth-century Church. In fact, the Church has always embraced many values central to the dominant value systems of the United States and other host countries, including an emphasis on family, hard work, and national loyalty. Nevertheless, moderate tension
remains, partly because of the Church’s claim of unique legitimacy.

“Churches” and “denominations” in sociological terminology differ from sects in that both of the former are organizationally complex and have positive relationships with society. Denominations accept the legitimacy claims of other religious groups, while churches do not (Roberts, pp. 181–202). There are several problems in classifying The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints according to this typology. Its claim to unique legitimacy makes it something other than a denomination, while its lack of societal dominance makes it something other than a church (except in Utah and certain other locations).

To explain unclear cases like this, sociologists developed an additional classification—the “established sect” (Yinger, pp. 266–73). An established sect is organizationally complex while retaining moderate tension with society and the claim to unique legitimacy. While the LDS Church meets these criteria, social scientists increasingly argue that it deviates sufficiently from conventional religious traditions to warrant even further classification outside of the church-denomination-sect typology. They argue that the term “new religion” is perhaps the most accurate and that modern-day Mormonism is on the verge of becoming a major new world religion (Stark, pp. 11–12).

[See also Cult.]

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SEED OF ABRAHAM
The “seed of Abraham” are those who, through righteousness, inherit the blessings promised Abraham through the covenant he made with the Lord and who themselves are a promised blessing to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–5; 13:16; 17; Abr. 2:6–11). The phrase also has messianic overtones: Abraham saw the days of the Messiah and rejoiced (John 8:56). Jesus Christ is of the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16).

In a lineal sense, two groups are called the “seed of Abraham” in scripture. The first comprises the literal descendants of Abraham through Isaac (Gen. 26:1–4) and Jacob (Gen. 28; 35:9–13), who are thus the twelve tribes of Israel. The second comprises the descendants of Ishmael and the many other children of Abraham.

In addition to those who are of lineal descent, all who are not of Abrahamic lineage but who become adopted by their acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and continued obedience to God’s commandments are heirs of all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (TPJS, pp. 149–50). Adoption is completed by the gospel ordinances, including baptism and confirmation; ordination to the priesthood, and magnifying one’s calling in the priesthood; the temple endowment; and eternal marriage, through which husbands, wives, and families share “all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Modern revelation assures that these people will have a fullness of blessings, even “all that [the] Father hath” (D&C 84:38). They are “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies,” and they become “the seed of Abraham” (D&C 84:34).

[See also Abrahamic Covenant; Gospel of Abraham.]

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SEER
In ancient usage, “seer” is an alternative term for prophet (1 Sam. 9:9). A seer is a person endowed by God with a special gift for seeing spiritually. In the modern Church, members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles serve as seers. These fifteen apostolic officials are designated prophets, seers, and revelators who direct the Church by means of divine revelation, with the President of the Church being the only one in whom the keys are fully active at any one time. Though all three titles describe revelatory capacity, the terms are not fully synonymous. A “prophet” is one who speaks for God; the office of “seer” extends that divine endowment to a capacity for envisioning future and past. The Book of Mormon teaches that a “seer is greater than a prophet,” because a seer is “a