

## CREMATION

Since the organization of the Church in 1830, Latter-day Saints have been encouraged by their leaders to avoid cremation, unless it is required by law, and, wherever possible, to consign the body to burial in the earth and leave the dissolution of the body to nature, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19). President Spencer W. KIMBALL wrote, “The meaning of death has not changed. It releases a spirit for growth and development and places a body in . . . Mother Earth” (p. 45). In due time the mortal body returns to native element, and whether it is laid away in a family-selected site or buried in the depths of the sea, every essential part will be restored in the Resurrection: “Every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame” (Alma 40:23).

To understand the LDS feeling about cremation, it is essential to understand the doctrine of the Church regarding the body. In a general conference Elder James E. Talmage, an apostle, stated, “It is peculiar to the theology of the Latter-day Saints that we regard the body as an essential part of the soul. Read your dictionaries, the lexicons, and encyclopedias, and you will find that nowhere, outside of The Church of Jesus Christ, is the solemn and eternal truth taught that the soul of man is the body and the spirit combined” (*CR*, Oct. 1913, p. 117).

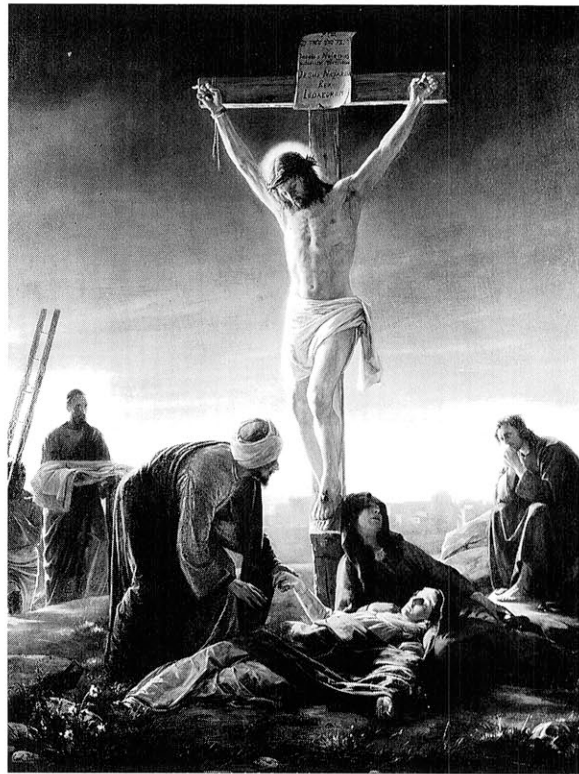
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## CROSS

The cross, a traditional symbol of Christianity, is displayed extensively in Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. In each tradition, the symbol of the cross focuses the worshiper’s attention on central elements of the Christian faith.



*The Crucifixion*, by Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834–1890; oil on copper plate; 20" × 30"). The Savior Jesus Christ is crucified on Calvary, offering himself as a sacrifice for mankind. Courtesy the Frederiksborg Museum, Hillerød, Denmark.

However, different theological points may be emphasized. For example, in Catholicism the crucifix (the cross with the dead Christ hanging on it) symbolizes the crucifixion of Christ and invites meditation on the Atonement. In contrast, the plain cross used by Protestants symbolizes not only the crucifixion but also the RESURRECTION of Christ, for the cross is empty. The Eastern Orthodox crucifix is a symbolic concept somewhere between those of Catholicism and Protestantism: Christ hangs on the cross, but as the living Lord, his head not bowed in death but raised in triumph. Thus, the crucifixion, the atonement, the resurrection, and the Lordship of Christ are all graphically presented in the Orthodox crucifix.

Latter-day Saints do not use the symbol of the cross in their ARCHITECTURE or in their chapels. They, like the earliest Christians, are reluctant to display the cross because they view the “good news” of the gospel as Christ’s resurrection more than his crucifixion.

The LDS conception of the PLAN OF SALVATION is comprehensive. It encompasses a COUNCIL IN HEAVEN; JEHOVAH's (Jesus') acceptance of his role as Savior; the VIRGIN BIRTH; Jesus' life and ministry; his saving suffering, beginning in Gethsemane and ending with his death at Golgotha; his burial; his preaching to the spirits of the righteous dead; his physical resurrection; and his exaltation to the right hand of the Father. No one symbol is sufficient to convey all this. Moreover, the cross, with its focus on the death of Christ, does not symbolize the message of a living, risen, exalted Lord who changes the lives of his followers. Thus, President Gordon B. Hinckley, counselor in the First Presidency, stated that the lives of people must become a "meaningful expression of our faith and, in fact, therefore, the symbol of our worship" (p. 92).

While the symbol of the cross is not visually displayed among the Latter-day Saints, the centrality of the Atonement is ever present in their observance of BAPTISM, the SACRAMENT of the Lord's Supper, and the temple ordinances, and in their hymns and TESTIMONIES. Without the atonement of Jesus Christ, there is no hope for the human family. Scripture is replete with the admonition that disciples of Christ must "take up their cross," yielding themselves in humility to their Heavenly Father (D&C 56:2, 14-16; 112:14-15), releasing themselves from the ties of WORLDLINESS (3 Ne. 12:20), and submitting themselves to PERSECUTION and even martyrdom for the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Ne. 9:18; Jacob 1:8).

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## CULT

The word "cult" has usages that range from neutral to pejorative. It derives from the Latin *cultus*, meaning "care" or "adoration." A neutral usage of the word refers to the system of beliefs and rituals connected to the worship of a deity. By this definition, virtually all religions, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, exhibit some cultic aspects.

However, the term "cult" more commonly refers to a minority religion that is regarded as unorthodox or spurious and that requires great or even excessive devotion. While the term is commonly used by the mass media and anticult movement in the late twentieth century as a negative label for such recently formed groups as the Unification Church and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishna movement), it has also been used to describe Pauline Christianity, Islam during the life of Muhammad, and MORMONISM in the nineteenth century.

The most common social-scientific definition identifies a cult as the beginning phase of an entirely new religion. As defined by this approach, a cult's central characteristic is that it provides a radical break from existing religious traditions (Roberts). The LDS Church's self-understanding of being a restoration movement that restored divine truths, rather than a reformation movement that purified existing truths, is consistent with the social-scientific understanding that nineteenth-century Mormonism was a cult due to its break from the existing religious traditions.

References to cult and other organizational classifications describe the characteristics of religious groups at particular moments in their history. Social scientists use these classifications to describe the normal process of religious evolution. Most groups that start as cults fail to survive more than a single generation; very few evolve into a developed new religion recognized by nonadherents as legitimate or conventional. Obviously, both Christianity and Islam successfully survived the transition from cult to new religion. Social scientists generally agree that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is no longer properly classified as a cult and should instead be viewed as a new religion. For example, sociologist Rodney Stark identified the LDS Church as the single most important case on the agenda of the scientific study of religion because it demonstrates how a successful new religious movement differs from the thousands of cults that fail to survive or develop into new religions.

[See also SECT.]

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