

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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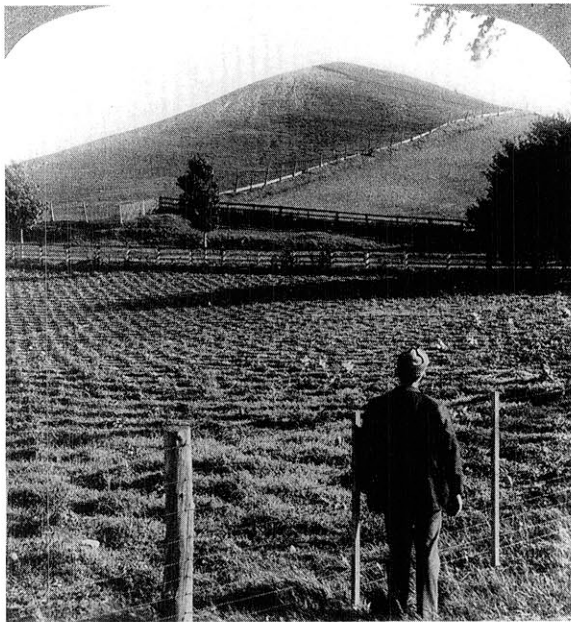
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## CUMORAH

Cumorah in the Book of Mormon refers to a hill and surrounding area where the final battle between the NEPHITES and LAMANITES took place, resulting in the annihilation of the Nephite people (see BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES). Sensing the impending destruction of his people, Mormon records that he concealed the plates of Nephi<sub>1</sub> and all the other records entrusted to him in a hill called Cumorah to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Lamanites (see BOOK OF MORMON PLATES AND RECORDS). He delivered his own abridgment of these records, called the plates of



The north end of the hill Cumorah, near Palmyra, New York, as it appeared c. 1900. More than thirty years after the final Nephite battle in A.D. 385, Moroni deposited the gold plates on the west side of this hill not far from the top. In 1827, the angel Moroni here entrusted those Book of Mormon plates to Joseph Smith, who translated them into English. The hill is a drumlin, a long hill with steep sides and a sloping end formed under an advancing continental ice sheet. Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University.

Mormon, and the small plates of Nephi, which he placed with them, to his son MORONI<sub>2</sub> (W of M 1:5; Morm. 6:6), who continued writing on them before burying them in an unmentioned site more than thirty-six years later (Moro. 10:1–2).

The Book of Mormon mentions a number of separate records that would have been part of Mormon's final record repository in the hill Cumorah. Though the contents of these can be known to us only to the extent that they are summarized or mentioned in the Book of Mormon, Latter-day Saints expect them someday to become available. Alma<sub>2</sub> prophesied to his son Helaman that the brass plates of Laban (the Nephites' version of the Old Testament) would be “kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord until they should go forth unto every nation” (Alma 37:4; cf. 1 Ne. 5:17–19). He further explained that “all the plates” containing scripture are the “small and simple” means by which “great things are brought to pass” and by which the Lord will “show forth his power . . . unto future generations” (Alma 37:5–6, 19).

Cumorah had also been the site of the destruction of the JAREDITES roughly 900 years earlier. Moroni states in the book of Ether that the Jaredites gathered for battle near “the hill Ramah,” the same hill where his father, Mormon, hid up “the records unto the Lord, which were sacred” (Ether 15:11). It was near the first landing site of the people of Mulek (Alma 22:30), just north of the land Bountiful and a narrow neck of land (Alma 22:32).

The more common reference to Cumorah among Latter-day Saints is to the hill near present-day Palmyra and Manchester, New York, where the plates from which the Prophet Joseph SMITH translated the Book of Mormon were found. During the night of September 21, 1823, Moroni<sub>2</sub> appeared to Joseph Smith as an angel sent from God to show him where these plates were deposited (JS—H 1:29–47).

In 1928 the Church purchased the western New York hill and in 1935 erected a monument recognizing the visit of the angel Moroni (see ANGEL MORONI STATUE). A visitors center was later built at the base of the hill. Each summer since 1937, the Church has staged the CUMORAH PAGEANT at this site. Entitled *America's Witness for Christ*, it depicts important events from Book of Mormon history. This annual pageant has reinforced the common assumption that Moroni buried the plates of Mormon in the same hill where his