

# LDS “Eccletheoculture”

(September 12, 2006)

**Grew up in Huntington Beach, CA.**

**#1 Junior high tried to belong to the surfing crowd popular in my town. It had a culture all of its own to which I really wanted to belong.**

- **Long hair, shorts, flip-flops and or no socks.**
- **Bishop who wanted me to belong to LDS culture.**
- **Good heart, but a little misdirected.**
- **Every culture presented me with a “conform or be cast out” mentality.**

**#2 Teenager style continued on.**

- **big stake dance came to town.**
- **standing with all my LDS friends, same Bishop picked me out, raised my pant leg, sent me home.**

Didn't conform, was cast out.

I was embarrassed, but it planted a seed in me to start examining organized religion and the pressures and manipulations found therein.

**These events, though I wasn't aware of it at the time, ignited a personal fire from within - I wanted to know if there was a difference between God and the groups that said they represented Him.**

**Last week received an**

**unfortunate call . . .**

- **friend had died unexpectedly.**
- **knew since we were kids.**
- **same ward.**
- **same Bishop.**

**Attended the funeral, dressed in the same attire I wear everyday.**

Decided long ago I was not going to be anything other than myself when it came to attire.

**After the graveside service, the same Bishop from my youth . . .**

**(Tell story of Nelson)  
“Nobody told me it was casual.”**

**(Tell Story of Kevin R.)  
Later received another condescending remark regarding my personal style (or lack of it).**

**In the end, these were two LDS men who believed it was their place, yes, even their right, to embarrass another human being, even a friend.**

**What the heck leads people to be so picky and mean and frankly antithetical to what Jesus was all about?**

Have you ever looked around you and said, “I’ll bet Jesus would really hate what is going on around here in His name,” or you read the New Testament and say to yourself, “The Jesus I read about is NOTHING like the one my Church says is behind all the junk they do.”

	<p>I have.</p> <p>I received an email a few weeks ago from a very nice man who was so pulled by the dichotomy in Mormonism he was about to go nuts.</p> <p>He wrote:</p> <p>(quote email)</p>
<p>Does this kind of junk go on because people believe this is what God desires, is it a result of doctrine, or is it culture?</p> <p>Let's talk about culture for a moment.</p> <p>In my book, <i>Born-again Mormon: Moving Toward Christian Authenticity</i>, we have an Appendix which includes a study from Dr. Robert J. Lifton, who is an expert on totalist methodologies and thought reform used by groups.</p>	<p>Dr. Lifton studied brainwashing in China for years and presents eight psychological and social methods that totalists groups (cults) use to influence and control the lives of their members. (<i>Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China</i> [Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press, 1981] {1961;reprint ed.}).</p> <p>Dr. Lifton is a distinguished professor of psychiatry and psychology at the Graduate School University Center and director of the Center on Violence and Human Survival at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.</p>

He previously held the Foundation's Fund Research Professorship of Psychiatry at Yale University for more than two decades.

He attended Cornell University, receiving his medical degree from New York Medical College in 1948.

Here is a general overview of these eight methods he found common to all groups who seek to manipulate and control the lives of others.

Now remember, these are his findings from studying tactics used by communist China.

### **1. Milieu (Environment) Control**

- The group seeks to control human communication within an environment.  
(At an extreme, it is an attempt to even control personal thought.)
- There is controlling influence over all that a believer sees, hears, reads, or even writes.
- The leaders hold long seminars, meetings, events and lectures with authority on behavior.
- They set-up and reinforce an 'us against them' mentality.
- The casual or official monitoring of individual change within the group.

## 2. **Mystical Manipulation** (In other words, they manipulate).

- There is extensive manipulation of attitudes and behavior.
- They promote “patterns of emotion” which seem spontaneous but have actually been orchestrated, often unconsciously, by leaders and believers.
- Leaders claim to be agents or chosen servants of God to carry out a “mystical imperatives.”
- “Principles of the organization” are placed forcibly and claimed exclusively, so that the cult and its beliefs become the only “way to truth or salvation.”
- Individual believers become psychological pawns, and participate actively in manipulating others under the auspices of “supporting the cause or truth.”
- Leaders central to the mystical manipulation (alive or dead) often become more real and identifiable than the notions of

an abstract God and therefore often become more attractive to followers than God Himself.

- The “totalist group” (cult) legitimizes deceptive practices (noble lies) in the name of protecting and promoting a ‘greater truth.’

### **3. Demands for Purity**

- The world becomes split between absolute evil (the world) and absolute good (the totalist group).
- Members must continually conform to the group norm or meet increased rejection/correction.
- Tendencies toward guilt and shame are used as emotional levers to influence, control, and manipulate the actions, thoughts, and behavior of believers.
- Black and white thought of believers becomes almost impenetrable by the rational complexities of inner sensitivities and the complexities of human morality. In other words, there is a great denial of human complexity. You are either in or you are out. It’s black. It’s

white. They deny human complexity because complexity cannot be controlled or addressed effectively. If you have complex issues, you are selfish. It is either black or white.

- A radical separation occurs between the pure/impure within the organization and the mind of the believer herself or himself.
- There is a focus on confession. A believer must confess when he or she has not conformed.

#### **4. Confession**

- Cult confession goes beyond normal religious, legal, or therapeutic expression. Confession becomes an end in and of itself.
- Confessions are accompanied by criticism and self-criticism with a major push toward self-improvement and personal change according to totalist rules.
- Confession is seen as an act of “surrendering the self” to the institution. When you confess, it is a sign of

conformity to the institutional demands and remorse for rebellion to it.

- Confession makes the healthy balance of worth and humility impossible.
- Believers will often confess to lesser crimes while holding out other secrets (such as criticism for the cult or leadership) to gain favor and receive leadership roles as a reward.
- Believers often develop an attitude that says, "The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge others," thereby feeding confessional behaviors.

## **5. Sacred Science**

- The totalist milieu (or cult) generates an "aura of sacredness" around its doctrine, holding it up as the "ultimate moral vision for the ordering" of human existence.
- Questioning or criticizing basic assumptions is prohibited or condemned.
- Reverence is demanded for all accepted doctrine, the originators of the doctrine, and

the present bearers of the doctrine.

- Sacred science offers considerable security to young people (or people with young hearts/minds) because it simplifies the world and answers a contemporary need to combine a sacred set of dogmatic principles with a claim to a science that embodies truth regarding human behavior and psychology. In other words, it is simple and makes it easy not to think or be responsible for thought.

## **6. Loaded Language**

- The language of a totalist movement is characterized by thought-killing clichés (“Is that important to your salvation?”).
- Communication occurs in all-encompassing jargon which is repetitiously used. (“I know, I know, I know.” “The Church is perfect, the people aren’t.”)
- There is a language of non thought, meaning lots of talk without any thinking.
- Words are often given new meanings so that the group

uses them differently from the outside world.

## **7. Doctrine over Person**

- Doctrine over person occurs when there is a conflict between what a believer thinks she or he is experiencing and what the group doctrine says she or he should experience.
- Every issue in the life of a person can be reduced to a single set of principles that have such inner coherence that a person can claim the experience of truth and actually feel it.
- If a believer questions the beliefs of the group or its leaders, she or he is made to feel that there is something wrong with him or her. The question is often turned on the questioner and the questioner is then questioned. The original question may never even get a response.
- The assumption is always that doctrine is ultimately more valid than any aspect of actual human character or experience. All believers must submit their experience to accepted doctrinal truth. In

	<p>the end, it's "Doctrine over person."</p> <p><b>8. Dispensing of Existence</b> (or the loss of individuality to organizational modes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Since the group has an absolutist or totalist vision of truth, those who are outside the group are evil, unenlightened, unsaved, and out-of-favor. They are enemies. In extreme cases, they do not have a right to an opinion or even to existence.</li><li>• Those outside the group can always receive the right to exist by joining the group.</li><li>• Fear manipulation, used if believers choose to leave the group, is implemented by claims that defectors have fallen out of favor with God, are damned, or will have something bad happen to them should they continue to pull away.</li><li>• The group is elite. The outside world is evil.</li></ul>
<p>Now listen to what the Word says about believers.</p> <p>Listen to the diversity of conditions, the liberty of existence within the body.</p>	

<p>It comes from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 6</p> <p>1 We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.</p>	
	<p>I image a religion where men and women love one another and accept one another as they are, as they come, as they desire to be known – and whether they stay in the group or not.</p> <p>I imagine a Christian religion without man-made expectations and demands, a place for scientists and artists, business men and women, homemakers and the homeless to worship and study the Word of God together in peace and truth.</p> <p>This is not utopian. This is Christianity.</p> <p>I image a Church where saints serve each</p>

	<p>other without assignment or calling, break bread together, and learn to appreciate the liberty Jesus affords.</p> <p>I imagine a Church without collars, hemlines, and suits, or other pretenses of the world. Where judgments come from God alone, and believers embrace ALL – ALL who come in through the doors.</p> <p>I imagine a Jesus would be welcome.</p> <p>Where Jesus would be welcome to sit as He is, to do as He pleases, and to love as only He knows how. . . . .</p> <p>Alright, let's go to the phones.</p>
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## END NOTES AND THOUGHTS

In an effort to help readers understand the almost intangible, unwritten order of control that exists in the L.D.S. Church (note Boyd K. Packers speech with this very title) I coined the rather long and awkward word, “Eccletheo-culture”. Without meaning to offend anyone, this controlling power operates in an almost Trinitarian manner, with the three parts actually being one, and the one all-powerful essence expressed in three unique, but inter-related parts.

By definition, L.D.S. eccletheoculture is the invisible, over-riding force that governs, guides, directs and prioritizes all the social, temporal, spiritual, emotional, financial, educational, familial and intellectual aspects of a Latter-Day Saints life.

## **THE ECCLESIASTIC**

The first part of eccletheoculture (Eccle) is derived from the word ecclesiastic, and refers to the actual physical structures, programs and priesthood leaders owned and recognized by the Church. The “Eccle” is the material of the earthly Church organization, including the actual physicality of its leadership.

Using a non-religious example for clarification, if we were discussing a national chain of bowling alleys called, Bowl USA, for example, the “Ecclesiastic” of the chain would be represented by the Bowl USA company itself and all of its corporate components, including the governing board of directors, the CEO and

CFO, vice presidents, regional managers, store managers, employees and all actual physical and/or tangible assets, including land, buildings and machinery. The Mormon Church comparative would be the prophet, apostles, seventy, Regional, Stake and Ward Leaders, as well as all the physical properties and holdings of the Church itself. The eccle of the Church is what a person can physically touch.

## **THE THEOLOGY**

“Theo” refers to the theology and doctrine of the L.D.S. Church. Within the present-day Church, exact doctrine and theology, though at first glance may seem easy to define, is truthfully very tough to get ones arms around and hold. Reasons for this include, but are not limited to, the existence of a large, lay clergy (which is tough to police and educate), the constant directive for all members to ‘follow the Spirit’ (or the idea that the holy spirit dictates personal truth, behavior and in the end doctrine), the belief of continued revelation from God to a modern-day prophet (who has the ability to over-ride official doctrine), a belief in a canon of ancient scripture (the Bible and Book of Mormon) and modern scripture( the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price) and the strongly held ideal that all men and women must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, which leaves considerable room for personal and ecclesiastical interpretation of what some Saints might consider hard and fast doctrinal positions. A fairly simple example of this might be found in the Latter-Day Saint doctrinal position on Sabbath-Day activities.

While both general recommendations and specific commands have been made regarding approved Sabbath-Day activities for the Saints, there are few absolute theological “rights or wrongs” promulgated by scripture or Salt Lake Leadership regarding the topic. There are warnings, cautions, and considerations, but there are also exceptions, and in the end, every person is free to interpret these rules according to the dictates of their own conscience. So while some Latter-Day Families are chided for certain Sabbath day activities others are praised.\*\* (note on L.D.S. celebrities, athletes and business icons)

As a result, some Saints will not do anything on Sunday’s but go to church, read scripture, pray and maybe visit the sick, while others, even those in high ecclesiastical positions, will watch television, travel, dine out or spend the day with family in the park. The point is, with nearly every assumed doctrinal stance within L.D.S. theology, there are exceptions, revisions and an element of personal interpretation that often takes the doctrinal stance and manipulates the rules.\*\* (do an ‘even the Word of Wisdom, the Saints most recognized doctrinal stance, is open to interpretation).

In our bowling alley example, the 'Theo' would be the rules of the game that Bowl USA has adopted for their patrons to adhere to and play by. It describes what constitutes a strike, spare, gutter-ball, foot-foul, etc. and notes how a player wins, advances, what actions would disqualify her/him, and all the parameters of accepted behaviors directly related to the playing of the game itself. Without the rules (theology) the game would not exist and neither would the Bowl USA Inc. In other words, while the theology is the reason the ecclesiastic exists, the ecclesiastic and theology presently and equally co-exist with each other. The ecclesiastic and the theology together produce the third part of the unseen force in the Church . . . the Culture.

## **THE CULTURE**

In the national bowling chain example, "culture" is created by 1), the influence of the corporation itself (the ecclesiastic), 2) the rules of the game (theology), with the finishing touches created by those patrons who actually bowl (members). While every bowling alley in the United States generally shares a cultural 'feel' (displayed in dress, music, entertainments, ambiance, footwear, habits of consumption including alcohol, tobacco and food-stuffs) separate chains, due to the direct influence of the parent company, the manner in which the rules of the game are interpreted, and the actual people who frequent their alleys, often create their own unique sub-cultures. This is the case of the culture that exists in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Contrary to what some people believe, the culture of most Christian religions (including those striving to be Christian) have a great deal in common with each other. Most are filled with ordinary people seeking to follow God and their quest for Him is manifested in similar fashions and opinions. Immodesty is generally frowned upon and condemned, drunkenness is not appreciated, sexual sin is often punished through some means and modes of unacceptable behavior are usually corrected by ecclesiastic authority.

There generally exists in any Church Christian or seeking to be Christian, a "happy to see you, Brother or Sister" feel, some sordid gossip (wrongly) flying about, and usually a long-running feud or stand-off between one member or another.

Likewise, the cultural demands of the religious institutions themselves are also quite similar. Almost every Christian church is in constant need of better missionary outreach programs, member/believer participation, youth ministries and competent bible/scripture study leadership. Mormon Bishops and Christian Pastor/Ministers are constantly counseling, serving and seeking to uplift the fallen spirits of the sheep in their respective flocks. Every church suffers from indifference, sin, depression, illness, death, birth, elderly cares and the ability to constantly create a viable, spirit-filled Sunday worship service. In the big picture,

Christians and Mormons individually and collectively face very similar cultural situations.

Yet, with all these similarities in mind, the culture in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is remarkably unique in ways when compared to historic Christianity.

For example, when Church authority states that members of the Church should seek “wholesome activities and appearances,” and when the theology specifically states that Saints should “be in the world, but not of it;” that they should “avoid even the very appearance of evil;” the cultural body at large, under the influence of wanting to do right, zeal, tradition, bias or outright control, might interpret these messages to mean that anybody seeking full fellowship and cultural acceptance in the congregation must constantly meet certain outward levels of complicity when it comes to dress, speech, dining habits, vacation destinations, Sabbath-Day activities, entertainments, hair styles, grooming standards, conspicuous consumption, etc., etc.

If, in the Trinitarian analogy, the L.D.S. Ecclesiastic is God the Son, a tangible representation of God, and the theology is God the Father, full of all the doctrine and theology needed to live according to His will, then Culture is the Holy Spirit, and its influence is a dominating force behind all great good (and ills) within the Church.

L.D.S culture is so dominant in the Church that it is often very difficult to differentiate between it and official doctrine (hence the need for a word like Eccletheoculture). Questions like how many children a couple should have, where people should obtain a college degree, how to spend a vacation, what political party is acceptable to the Lord and what forms of entertainment, dress, dining, speech, home décor are appropriate are all addressed, in some degree or another, by L.D.S. culture. What a member chooses to follow is an entirely different matter.

The attention and allegiance a member of the Church pays to L.D.S. eccletheoculture is often viewed as indicative of his or her stalwartness in the faith and therefore, their standing before God. There have been instances where some Saints have been viewed as slacking – to God and the Church – for having their child attend the University of Utah rather than the Church’s own Brigham Young. Some Latter-Day families are ostracized for the cars they choose to own, the style and brand of their clothing and even the restaurants they frequent. Strange as it may sound, following the Churches cultural expectations is almost as important, almost as respected, by the general body of the Church, as following the doctrine. However, no aspect of the Church’s Eccletheoculture is as important as following the leadership. Latter-Day Saints believe that a person can never go wrong in following the ‘brethren’ because even if a leader was to lead a member astray, the Lord would reward them for their obedience.\*\* (cite)

There is a way to speak in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and there is a way to pray.\*\* (note the set formula) There is a way to teach a class and a way to deliver a speech. There is a way to look out of your eyes and there are ways to conduct business. There is an approved place to get married and approved methods of raising children. There are accepted forms of government, respected norms of behavior and rejected ideologies of men. But there is always a way.

There is a way to say every word under the sun, to manage every problem life brings, a way to look when in the bedroom, on the street or in the chapel. Every decision life requires has been answered, by the leaders, by the doctrine, or by the culture. And every member must choose to either follow these ways or face the fallout that comes from rejecting them. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the eccletheoculture positively and negatively rules. It's up to every member to decide for his or herself how they want to play the game.