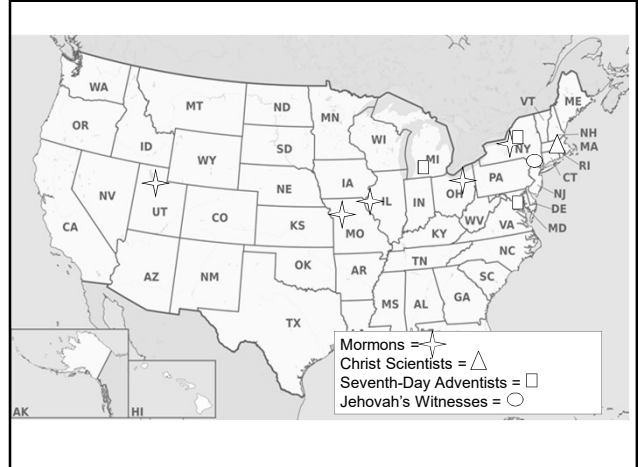


God in Our Culture: American-Born "Christianities"

Session 8, March 24
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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)

- Official name indicates their self-identification – as Christians
- "Latter-Day" distinguishes this church from the church in former days which fell away from the truth of Jesus shortly after it was founded.

LDS -- Mormons

- "Saints" is a New Testament word for church member
- "Mormon" comes from "Book of Mormon"
 - Written by Mormon, prophet to North American continent
 - Records the story of the people of Lehi, a Hebrew who had led a colony of people from Jerusalem to America about 600 BC (BCE)

LDS founded by Joseph Smith

- Grew up in an area and time of great religious activity
- Was confused about which claims he heard were true or contained the truth
- Seeking God's help for his confusion, he was told by God that none of those religions were true; all had fallen away

... Joseph Smith (1805 – 1844)

- 1823: the angel Moroni appears with the message that he is to be God's servant to restore the church to the fullness of the Gospel.

... Joseph Smith (1805 – 1844)

- 1827: Moroni reveals the location of the golden plates on which the what would become the Book of Mormon was written
 - Plates taken up to heaven after Smith finished the translation
 - There is more to the story ... **

Joseph Smith

- LDS church was established in the spring of 1830 with five people
- Persecutions began immediately
- Moved about the east and mid-west, ending up in Carthage, Illinois
- Smith, brother Hyrum and others jailed there; a mob killed Smith and his brother while they were jailed in 1844

The Mormon Trail to Utah

- A group of Smith's followers led by Brigham Young moved to the Utah territory to what is now Salt Lake City
- Salt Lake City became the world headquarters for LDS in 1847

Not all followed Young ...

- Smith's widow and young son disputed Young's leadership and stayed in Illinois
- This group formed the nucleus of what would be come the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints = RLDS
- Headquartered in Independence, MO

Early Practice Produced Predicament

- Revelation received from God commanding the practice of men having more than one wife (polygyny)
- Practice began in 1843

Early Practice Produced Predicament

- Public outcry was huge
- Statehood of Utah was contingent on abandoning of the practice
- 1890: church leaders announce the practice was no longer approved

Beliefs

- *Book of Mormon* considered scripture equal to the Bible
 - *Doctrine and Covenants*
 - Collection of new revelations at various times for specific purposes
 - *The Pearl of Great Price*
 - Contains revelations received by Smith
- Thirteen Articles of Faith based on these writings

Beliefs -- God

- Believe in the Trinity but Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate individuals
 - Distinct from each other but united in purpose
 - Father and Son have physical bodies “much like our own”
 - Holy Spirit is a spirit

Beliefs -- people

- Absolute belief in “free agency”
 - People have free will and will be held accountable for their own sins
- People come to this earth from a pre-earth existence and the ability to choose between right and wrong is the most important thing we’ve brought with us

Beliefs -- salvation

- Comes by way of faith and works
 - Salvation may be lost by “lack of effort to live the gospel”
- Degrees of exaltation
 - Heaven is divided into different realms
 - Highest realm is available only to those who fully follow the laws of the church
 - In the highest realm a person becomes a god

Beliefs – continuous revelation

- God's will was revealed in the Bible, to Joseph Smith and to the leaders of the church
- God will yet reveal many significant things
- Allows leadership to be flexible on issues not directly dealt with in the Bible or other Mormon scriptures

Lifestyle

- *Word of Wisdom* – a health code that was revealed to Joseph Smith in 1833
- Family is central
- Everyone is expected to marry
- Extended family is important
- Education is important
- Self-sufficiency encouraged

"Ritual"

- Stake meetings much like Protestant church meetings
- Temple rituals are very distinct
 - Temples not open to non-Mormons after they have been dedicated
 - Person needs a Temple Recommend
 - Details of rituals are not to be revealed to outsiders

Organization

- Based on ideas of *theocracy*
- The Church is under the direct rule of God
 - Highest leaders of the church continually receive revelations from God

Organization

- President of the church is considered to be a prophet of God
- President plus two counselors make up the First Presidency
- The Quorum of Twelve Apostles advise the First Presidency

Organization

- Priesthood
- Missionary work
- Mormon Tabernacle Choir

Other resources

- Brodie, Fawn. *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith*. New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 1995.
- Brighurst, Newell G., ed. ***Reconsidering "No Man Knows My History": Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect***. Utah State University Press, 1996.

Christian Scientists

Christian Scientists

- Belong to Church of Christ, Scientist
- Founded by Mary Baker Eddy
 - Experience miraculous healing in 1866 after reading the Bible
- Bible and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (by Eddy) are the sources of teaching

Beliefs

- All that God created is good because a good God cannot create evil

Beliefs

- “the only reality that the evils of sin, sickness and death have is that which we give them, because our erring human thought attributes to them a reality they do not have”

Beliefs

- The power of God for healing rather than medical treatment
 - No pressure if you seek a physician; encourage to strengthen faith
 - Strongly discouraged from mixing the two types of care
- The cause and cure of illness is spiritual

Beliefs

- Practitioners aid those seeking Christian Science healing
- Healing is by prayer but divinely natural

Beliefs about God

- divine Principle
 - Love
 - Mind
 - Spirit
 - Soul
 - Life
 - Truth
- } ■ 7 synonyms for God

Beliefs

- Church is focused on Jesus, the Christ
- Accept Jesus as the incarnation of the Christ
- Theirs is a scientific religion
 - God operates through timeless spiritual laws that are absolute good; thus Christianity can be scientifically applied to every human ill

Organization

- Meets on Sundays, most of what happens is determined by the Mother Church
 - Midweek services focus on testimonies of healing and Q&A

Organization

- Board of Lectureship authorized to give public lectures to explain Christian Science
- Also publish *Christian Science Monitor*
- Also
 - Monitor radio and television network
 - *Herald of Christian Science*

Seventh-Day Adventists

Part of the “adventist believers”

- Adventism emphasizes
 - Christian teaching that the return of Christ will be a literal, physical event
 - Most believe it will happen soon
 - Those who are rebel against God will be destroyed; true believers will be saved.
 - Sometimes linked with the “holiness” movement – those seeking to prepare daily for Christ’s return

Divisions in adventist belief

- Occur when date set for Christ’s return and then nothing happened
- Disappointment leads to differences of opinion and separation
- Disagreement over whether the Lord’s Day should be celebrated on Saturday or Sunday

Enter Seventh-Day Adventists

- 22 Oct 1844 was predicted as Christ's return
- Prediction proved to be incorrect
 - Often known as the Great Disappointment
- Disaffected believers began to meet, Ellen G. White and her husband among them

Mrs. White received revelations

- During meeting, she went into a trance
- Soon accepted by the group as a prophet

Mrs. White received revelations

- Revelations included these keys
 - Sabbath was to be celebrated on Saturday
 - 22 Oct was the correct date; something different had happened
 - New interpretation of the facts restored hope and effects of the Great Disappointment were overcome

Beliefs

- Seventh-Day Adventists are the "remnant church"
 - A people called out in the last days to be the true church
- Support of sound health practices
 - Have organization to set up and/or run hospitals
 - Resemble LDS emphases
 - Abstain from pork

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses

- Official name is Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1881)
- Do not consider themselves a church
 - Rather a group of Bible students and publishers of God's word
 - Publish means both to print and to make public
- Organized by Charles Russell in 1870s

Beliefs

- In the transitional times that precede the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth
- These times began in 1914 (advent of WWI)
- Living in the "time between the times" motivates door-to-evangelism
- Theirs is the one true faith

Beliefs

- Focuses on Bible study and discussion
- Teachings supported by elaborate system of references to scripture
- Bible was accurately recorded but falsely or incorrectly translated
 - *New World Translation* corrects these errors

Beliefs

- God is gathering the righteous to spare them from Armageddon
- Only a limited number (144,000) will live and reign with God in heaven
- The rest will live in peace and harmony on a restored earth

Beliefs

- Those called to separate themselves (now) from the world are to form a theocracy
- Community under God's rule
 - Maintain separation by avoiding involvement the political realm
 - Refuse blood transfusions
 - No Biblical reason for celebrating holidays

Beliefs

- Critical of the three strongest allies of Satan
 - Government
 - Big business
 - Churches that teach false doctrines (all except the Witnesses)
- All these must be destroyed before God can recreate the world

Additional resource

- Stein, Stephen J. Communities of Dissent: A History of Alternative Religions in America. Oxford University Press, 2003.