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A Baby Boomer Transformation: The Current Generation of Leadership and The Remaking of the Reorganized Church

Introduction

Liberal¹ educated middle-class Baby Boomers now dominate the leading quorums of the church. They are privileged members of a great American generation and social class whose impact are now redefining the church's administration, sense of history, and spiritual vision. Almost single-handedly, Boomers are transforming the Reorganization by driving its quest to create a new RLDS identity, mission, and theology.

Understanding the formative history of RLDS Baby Boomers and the overall impact this generation has had on American religious culture is essential to understanding the church's current condition and quest for transformation.² As a key American demographic, Boomers have been the social and political engineers simultaneously detangling and redefining the relationship of America's churches, traditional definitions of religious identity and authority, and religion's moral and cultural influence.

Within the Reorganization, Boomerization of the church and its culture have had similar redefining effects. Facing a declining North American church and a culture reshaped by their own generation, today

¹ I hesitate to even use the term "liberal" because the meaning of the term in the church is in dire need of reconsideration and redefinition. It lacks adequate meaning. However, I find it important term here because, even as a dated term, liberalism is an important ideological mindset that has had definitive theological and social force in the church, especially as it is represented in our current generation of leadership. "Liberal," here, means generally a dispositional suspicion of traditional social and religious authority, which actively sought to discredit and uproot reigning forms of religious traditionalism, dogmatism, and cultural conservatism in society and religion. Localized to the Reorganization, the term "liberal" has been inseparable from the mindset and controversies surrounding a principle-centered generation whose leaders demanded a greater sense of personalism, individualism, and change in the church, explicitly over and against those powers and perspectives that would resist change and preserve the cultural form and theological perspective of the RLDS church as it was known amongst the membership up and through 1970. (I choose 1970 because it was the year that copies of the exploratory "Position Papers" were circulated by dissenters to delegates of World Conference. The history of this unrest in the church, of course, began much earlier. And, the church's leadership was very aware, even responsible, for this exploration of new theological directions.)

² I speak here of the Community of Christ as a predominantly North American church and its sense of North American identity and history.

RLDS Boomers stand in leadership inheriting a difficult and decisive point in RLDS history. In response, the leading edge of this demographic strives to lead the church by driving it toward further reinterpreting itself. Motivated to remake the Reorganization, they seek to transform the RLDS church into a renewed and revised “Community of Christ.”

Why This Study Now?

Much has been written in the last forty-some years about the shifts taking place in the Reorganization. Most of this literature, however, has centered on sorting Restoration history from RLDS theology. However, little to none has treated these decades of ecclesial change in the terms of a sociological approach. As a result, the church’s vision for transformation and view of itself clearly suffers.

First, a sociological approach could help the church by giving it tools to analyze the cultural and the ideological forces at work transforming the church. Critically apprehending and understanding these movements could deepen the leadership’s ability to join and shape the struggle for theological and institutional change, as opposed to fall to the default of modern institutionalism, namely, to drive, manage, and control it.

Second, this kind of paradigmatic shift towards sociological inquiry stays true to the demythologizing and demystifying currents of historical-criticism that has transformed the church over the last few decades. A sociological approach would continue to underscore the fact that no revelation or force of religious authority “drops to us out of the sky.” *Each voice and quest for change has a context and a history.* This is as true for the language and ideas of scripture, the prophetic direction dictated to us by church leadership, and the divisive issues rumbling amongst the membership. Few would deny that change in the church, such as shifts in congregational activity, denominational polity, or moral controversy, happen in relation to economic, social, and political forces. Each affect the church’s diverse

cultural context. These forces intermingle to shape the political views, religious paradigms, and social behavior of groups both dominant and absent in the church.

One strand of analysis of these groups is generational study. Generational research critically attempts to ascertain and interpret cultural forces of tension and transformation. It attempts to parse out the religious, social, political, and economic dimensions of particular historical groups through disciplined research and comparative analytics. Though it is only one tool among many – and one with critical limitations – generational study can serve as crucial tool for approaching and deepening the church’s struggle for understanding and transformation by historically locating and socially contextualizing the forces of change at work in the demography of the North American church. The North American church remains the overwhelming pool of members from which the church constitutes its leadership. Moreover, demographic shifts are important as seen in their effects of graying churches and the mass influx of 40 to 50-somethings into leading quorums of leadership. Appreciating these shifts give us deeper understanding of the paradigmatic changes that shape and reshape our understanding of the church and its faith. Demographic study is a window in transformation already happening.

In this paper, I draw from marketing and sociological research, in addition to scholarship on Boomers and American religiosity, to show how Baby Boomers are the key demographic force behind the current reshaping of the Reorganized church. I will show how this generation’s formative years coincide with a wave of religious and social change that has had a deep and redefining affect on the RLDS church: its membership, as well as the very identity of the “Reorganization.” I will follow this ripple of transformation through today to show how, to date, Boomers almost exclusively comprise the church’s current generation of leadership. They are the leaders leading in Boomer fashion, attempting to reinterpret RLDSism in hopes of alchemically transforming it into a contemporary version. With the appropriate background, I will show how the current leadership of the church propels itself under the precepts of their own generational worldview and spirituality. My hope is that by my conclusion, it is

clear that the Baby Boom and its reinvention of religious concepts, spiritual vision, and institutional leadership are the principle engine driving the religious vision to transform the RLDS church into a vibrant international Community of Christ.

This Study's Roots

This paper flows from three independent sources that highlight the timeliness of this study on the Baby Boom and remaking the Reorganization. First, this paper is deeply indebted to Dr. Tex Sample, this year's Theology and Ministry Forum keynote speaker. I had the privilege to be a student and advisee of Dr. Sample the last year of his tenure at Saint Paul School of Theology. Through Tex, I was introduced to the powerful relationship theology and sociology carried on in the life of the church.

Second, I write this paper in response to this year's Theology and Ministry Forum, "Theologies Across the Generations." As the theme implies, the insight and research striving to understand the generations can have a key role in accessing the current struggles and possibilities of transformation in the church. This paper attempts to critically influence that discussion.

Third, Wade Clark Roof's recent book, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, inspired this study.³ Scholars like Roof make it much easier to access how the "Me Generation" has redefined the spiritual language and religious paradigms discursively flowing throughout American society and religiosity. The hope of this paper is to demonstrate how the Reorganization is no exception.

I. Interest in Generations and "What is a Generation, Anyway?"

Rising Interest in Generations

The title of this year's Theology and Ministry forum is "Theology Across the Generations." As the title implies, interest in understanding the generations has become increasingly popular in America's

³ Roof is a leading sociologist of religion whose noted books include, Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journey's of the Baby Boom Generation*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993) and *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

mainline churches, including the Community of Christ.⁴ A main reason is that generational studies help America's graying churches better understand the crisis of decline occurring across mainline denominations and their congregations. As religious views change and the spiritual perspectives of generations diversify, ongoing generational research helps mainline churches understand why segments of American culture distance themselves from institutional religion. This, in turn, helps churches strategize customized approaches to ministry that might reach out for greater inclusion and to populations who might never come to church. One of the motivations for this project was that, unfortunately, the consciousness raising about the generations in the Community of Christ hasn't seemed to successfully produced any of these promised effects.⁵

One reason is that there has been insufficient analysis of the complete spectrum of generational influences across the church. Perhaps, the preceding years of generational tension over issues of change and tradition has made it difficult to look beyond youth and young adults. Or, maybe the Baby Boom's dominance in American culture and church leadership has made the present set of paradigms driving the church's quest for change so normative and unquestionable that their generational character has become transparent. Regardless, unless generational interest falls to the wayside as another fad or fleeting topical interest, a broader understanding of the forces of transformation in the church can only help unravel challenges thwarting the struggle for change. The legacy of the Baby Boom must be considered if other populations are going to pick up the church's cause.

⁴ The burgeoning businesses of congregational resources and literature like that of George Barna and the Alban Institute are examples. As for the RLDS/Community of Christ, the work of Mike Hoffman in Youth Ministries, Larry Tyree (compiling the statistical reasons for the church's "Mission to North America"), and Transformation 2000 are examples of generational studies and their influence in the church.

⁵ The most recent example is Transformation 2000, which specifically targeted youth and "young adults." Though, it was not couched explicitly in the contemporary generational language, it contained explicit attempts to reach out and incorporate younger generations whose numbers had been continually declining in the church. However, membership reports taken after T2000 suggest little to no change in steady decline of baptisms and participation has occurred amongst the generations after the Baby Boom. Since, 1980, the Reorganized church has been in decline in North America and the presence of younger generations in the church has been the most significant factor in decline. In addition, the "Path of Disciple" initiative following Transformation 2000 has seemed to distance itself from the generational language concern and concern, which has clearly not been adequately addressed. For more information and comparative statistics on the decline of younger generations and the demographics of church membership versus the U.S. population, see Larry Tyree, "Mission to North America" report. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Independence, Missouri), 2001.

What is A Generation?

The most common misuse of generational information is what one might call, *generational-ism*. Generationalism is when people in positions of power unconsciously or consciously use generational information to prejudice, pigeonhole, or label persons and populations because of certain attitudes or dispositions that can be assigned to age. While sociological information may lend itself to such pigeonholing, generational study actually seeks to more deeply understand generational groups by attempting to access the history and cultural forces at work upon a generation's characteristics, attitudes, and behavior. Sociology recognizes individuals can't be completely removed from groups and their history.

To reshape our thinking about "generations," I suggest starting simply with numbers, i.e. birthrates. Alison Stein Wellner of *American Demographics* journal explains,

"After World War II, America was in the mood to procreate. Between 1946 and 1964, roughly 76 million babies were born, and each year there were more babies born than the year before. After 1964, this trend reversed – hence the Baby Bust, or Generation X. In 1977, many Boomer women decided to have children, and the birthrate began to climb steadily – creating the "Echo Boom," or Generation Y. [also referred to as the Millennials]"⁶

Birthrates are the starting point for generational research. Once these cohort groups are identified, marketers and sociologists then conduct research to find certain trends, for instance, in political interests, religious attitudes, or spending practices. Next, certain predictable patterns are assessed to further our understanding and probe for further investigating. This, in turn, provides more critical and detailed information about a generation, which can then be refined and used by marketers, organizations, or other researchers for strategic awareness and planning.

Another approach to generational descriptions is through the use of generational theories. An example of this approach is the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe. Generational theorists look at historical events, cultural shifts, and generational characteristics that indicate generational patterns or

⁶ Alison Stein Wellner, "Generational Divide: Are Traditional Methods of Classifying a Generation Still Meaningful in a Diverse and Changing Nation?" *American Demographics* 22, no. 10 (October 2000), 52-58.

theories. These can then be used to affect generational descriptions. For example, Strauss and Howe, author of the acclaimed book *Generations*, define Baby Boomers as beginning in 1943 versus 1946, before the post-war birthrate boom actually began. This is because Strauss and Howe anchor the Baby Boom on the onset of World War II rather than just procreative statistics. They use the war as the cultural point of departure of Boomers from the previous generation.

In the first half of the next section, I draw on a variety of resources that consider birthrates, demographic research, sociological interpretations, and generational theory to approach the question of Baby Boomers and the church. The vast research underlying these textual resources parallel much of the generational literature marketed to churches. However, I have chosen to use academic and marketing resources, i.e. non-religious or non-church marketed resources, to stay closer to primary sources and interpretations. Steering clear of congregational growth material, I remove a layer of bias and accent the more prevalent and dominant themes of the Baby Boom heralded by demographers. Marketing groups and scholars rely more closely on this sort information, and as a result, they more rigorously meet the demand for accuracy and validity.⁷

II. A Brief Profile of America's Baby Boomers

A Very Brief Generational Profile

Baby Boomers: born in America between 1943-1964⁸

⁷ One caveat needs to be stated about the use of generational material, especially as it might be used in the church: Generational studies are studies that search out dominant culture groupings. Therefore, they focus on characteristics that lend themselves to mainstream, predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual, populations and their churches. When not critically interpreted and applied, generational paradigms perpetuate the invisibility of minority groups in and outside the church. In short, they preclude the importance of race, sexuality, or gender. For an illustration, "The Forgotten Baby Boom" by Alison Stein Wellner describes how 11% of America's Baby Boomers, 9 million Black Americans, have essentially escaped attention. See Alison Stein Wellner, "The Forgotten Baby Boom." *American Demographics* 23 no. 2 (Fall 2001), 46-51.

⁸ William Strauss and Neil Howe, leading publishers of academic resources on generational theory, define Baby Boomers as those born between 1943-1960 due to the significant experience of those pre- and post-war. Smith and Clurman of Yankelovich Partners, Inc., a prominent consumer research organization, use birthrate and define Baby Boomers as those born between 1946-1964. Wade Clark Roof, a leading voice on Baby Boomers and American churches in the sociology of religion, defines Baby Boomers as born between 1946-1962. Using ranges inclusively (1943-1964), Baby Boomers make up

A Reorienting Force, Boomers Demand Their World's Attention. Boomers have always demanded social, religious, economic, and political attention. “From VJ-Day forward, whatever age bracket Boomers have occupied has been the cultural and spiritual focal point for American society as a whole.”⁹ Boomers were America’s first “teenagers.” Silly Putty, the Hoola Hoop, and Sock Hops were all invented for the Baby Boom. True also in the church, this natural shift in the attention began with growth in congregational life and church planting, particularly larger youth groups and camps.¹⁰

In the 1960’s, America’s first Boomers were growing into young adulthood and questioning religious, social, and political authorities. Early on, idealistic Boomer activists confronted the authorities of tradition and institutionalism with Vietnam War protests and the sexual revolution. This marked a sharp contrast from the social conformity of loyalties of previous generations. Moreover, America’s attention on these young people was dramatically increased by the advent American media. The Vietnam War, protests like Kent State, and Woodstock arrested America’s attention as TV piped these events into America’s living room, and Rock and Roll was exploding its messages over America’s radios.

In the 1970’s, war protests contributed to the ending of the Vietnam war and Boomers began flooding America’s workforce. Securing their selves in society, Boomers were pioneering a gender revolution and Seventies feminism, along with women’s rights. While Rosie the Riveter went home after

15 of 18 members of the First Presidency, Presiding Bishop, and Council of Twelve. Cultural demographics, of course, define the relevance of generational categorizations. Thus, members counted as Baby Boomers were either from the U.S. or Canada, W. Grant McMurray being the only Canadian. Those not classified as Baby Boomers are President Ken Robinson (b.1941, Australia), President Judd (b 1943 England), and Bunda Chibwe (b. 1955, Zambia). For reference, see William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 299. J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman, *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 46. Wake Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 34.

⁹ Strausse and Howe, 301.

¹⁰ Anecdotally, I have had many conversations with Boomer church members and leaders that reference frequently experiences in Zion’s League and other youth group activities in their congregations, particularly, the considerable sport, fellowship, and worship activities available on “the Campus” in the church’s Center Place, Independence, Missouri. This has sharp contrast, overall, with the experiences of Generation X whose upbringing in the church coincides with the drop-off of the Baby Boom, which correlated with a shrinking in youth and youth activity in the church (birthrates hitting their lowest in 1973), and the decline of the North American church commencing in 1980. For more information on the sharp contrast between the formative years if the Baby Boom and Gen X, see my presentation, “Infamous Yet Unknown: (the Absent) Generation “X”” in this volume.

the war was over, in the seventies Boomers pushed for the ERA and a permanent place for women in the work place.

The redefining moments of the 1980's unfolded in the wake of the two previous decades. Open-minded, liberal, and radical early Boomers were entering adulthood and having their own families. Boomer's were now full-fledged in America's social, political, and religious mainstream. The force of their optimistic principles and ideas, however, were beginning to polarize the nation and their own generation.¹¹ Boomer optimism and call to progress was beginning to confront the emotional demands of needed security. In response, America's right and left were beginning to increasingly polarize. There was a resurgence of American Evangelicalism and conservatism in reaction to the economic instability of the late seventies and eighties, the advent of AIDS, increased drug use, and high divorce rates. Late Boomers joined older generations calling for pullback to traditional values, religion, national identity. There was a renewed entrenchment between the New Right and Left, and its effects were being made know even in America's churches.¹²

In the 1990's, the sheer numbers of Baby Boomers and their cultural influence meant Bill Clinton would replace George Bush in the U.S. Presidency; a generation would be skipped in U.S. Presidency.¹³ Economically, Boomers were moving into late adulthood and reaching their peak spending in the economic life-cycle. This fueled an economic upturn that overtook the economic boom of the 1950's as largest economic expansion in U.S. history. Many of the Boomer's children, the Millenials, would grow up in this Boom, which revolutionized retail and the securities market, exploding a mutual fund frenzy, driven by Boomers anxiously seeking resources for coming retirement.

¹¹ For further explanation, see Wade Roof Clark 89-148; see also Stausse and Howe, 304

¹² As seen in the RLDS church, this "liberal/conservative" eruption was central in the schism and Restorationist movement over ordination of women in 1984. In the same year and in the wake of its own ideological redefinition, the Southern Baptist Convention refused women as pastors in 1984.

¹³ The "Silent Generation" would never seen one of their own in the U.S.'s highest office. Strauss and Howe describe as being born from 1924-1942 has always lived in the shadow of these two competing forces: the Boomers (Bill Clinton) and the G.I.'s (George Bush). See Strauss and Howe, pages 279-294.

At the turn of the century, a leading journal in the catering and food service industry states, “50+ Boomers will not be denied their power.”¹⁴ As of 2001, the largest lobbying group in Washington D.C., the AARP, is undergoing a makeover to appeal to America’s Baby Boomers who are redefining “maturity” and refusing to be called “Seniors.”^{15, 16} Boomers still exercise enormous economic and institutional power as a numerically large demographic, overshadowed only by their children, the Millennials. They are leading today’s businesses, social institutions, and religious organizations as a generation accustomed to influence and a culture reoriented in their wake. As we will see, the Community of Christ is no exception.

Individualists. The reason Wade Clark Roof begins each of his books on Boomer spirituality with individual stories about Boomers on *their own* spiritual “journey” is because Boomers are unwavering individualists.¹⁷ They are the revolutionaries of personal perspective and expression. Boomers are the “me” and “my” generation, the moral, political, and economic champions of market choice, customization, and personalism.¹⁸

Boomer individualism has literally re-centered the very paradigms of liberal and conservative Christianity on the person. Religious liberals recognize the need for ‘personal theology’ and ‘personal journey,’ while the tagline that hallmarks almost every evangelical in America is, ‘Do *you* have a *personal* relationship with Jesus Christ?’ From personalized religion to customized personal hair care products, Boomers demand individual attention and press the search for individuality. They have created a new culture of spiritual values and economic privilege that seeks out self-expression and what “works for me.”

¹⁴ Potter, “Betting on the Boomers.”

¹⁵ See Aileen Jacobson, “AARP Changes its Look as it Readies for Boomers, 50+ *Magazine*. March 25, 2001.

¹⁶ Refusing to be called “Seniors,” see Smith and Clurman, 65.

¹⁷ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), and *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and Remaking of American Religion*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). For further discussion, see Strausse and Howe, 303, and Smith and Clurman 47-49.

¹⁸ For example, in 2001, AARP launched a new publication geared to Boomers called “My Generation.” The name was chosen by Boomer focus groups.

The impact of Boomer individualism was its stark contrast with the collectivism of preceding generations. Boomer parents and grandparents grew up in a world shaped by largely by the Depression and two World Wars. They were loyal, respected authority, and valued hard work and tradition. Boomers' parents survived through self-denial, working together in national and social crises for the sake of neighbor, God, and country. By contrast, most Boomers grew up in the economic prosperity of the 1950's in social stability afforded by their parents' sacrifices. In addition, they were the children first feeling the questions brought onto Western society after the horror of Nazism, the carnage of two world conflicts, and the experiences of thousands of American's own gone abroad. In this context, Boomers found the self-denial and social conformity of their parent's generation repressive, parochial, and unnecessary. Boomers responded by proclaiming the spiritual liberation of the individual, the reign of choice, and human agency. Boomers were a generation casting a new dream of freedom, whose vision on carries through today.¹⁹ America's religious, economic, political, and social foundations would shake in their wake. Two generations later, the rationale and morality underwriting good parenting, personal finance, job performance, religious preference, sexuality, and social habits is intimately tied to a culture reshaped in the wake of individualism. The moral question cannot be avoided by the experts, "Well, what will work for you?"

The Self: Interiority and Self-fulfillment. The values of Boomer culture conceptually hang together. Boomer individualism and the quest for individuality coincide with a spirituality and responsibility to care for 'the self.' Turning their parents' external values of conformity, self-denial, and social duty on their head, Boomers began to look inside and turn inward for spiritual resources and

¹⁹ There is a billboard on I-196 Westbound right outside of Holland, Michigan that simply states the word in bold white letters, "Freedom." This caption is below a grand image, not of an American Flag or the fallen Twin Towers, but the view of the drummer over the 300,000+ crowd at Woodstock, 1969.

personal strength.²⁰ Today, our best understanding the world around us can no longer be conceived of alone without an account for what is happening with the self.

Caring for the self involves Boomers seeking the resources to “transform” themselves. This can mean finding ‘inner peace,’ as well as, striving to ‘be effective.’ Boomers have created the self-help market and defined the gurus and moguls of the industry: Dr. Phil, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Gary Zukav, Anthony Robbins, and Steven Covey.

The turn inward is afforded by the positive belief that Boomers live in a world of potentially endless abundance and possibility. Personally and inwardly focused, this optimistic world-view begets a sense of entitlement and privilege, which distinctly sets Boomer apart from neighboring generations.²¹ *Self-determination*, *self-confidence*, and *self-fulfillment* operate out of a belief-system that life and individuality is intrinsically valuable and not to be denied. Family, career, church, and country, are meant to be incorporated into a *self-fulfilling* life-style.²² After the social revolution of the 1960’s, the choice to sacrifice or indulge, delay gratification or act extravagantly, flow out of a new moral center. That center is the care, well-being, and possibility of the self and its expression.

Optimistic Principle-Oriented Idealists. Dissatisfied or unfulfilled by the world’s present condition, Boomers, also, characteristically seek to transform their world.²³ One researcher describes the 1960’s as a time when Boomers “found their parents’ world in need of a major spiritual overhaul, even creative destruction.”²⁴ Boomers carry a general panoramic belief in transformation, and do so on the basis of idealism, principle-centered reasoning, and a sense of personal responsibility that drives for

²⁰ Strausse and Howe quote Todd Gitlin’s term describing this inward turn of Baby Boomers, “the voyage to the interior.” (302); see also Smith and Clurman, 43.

²¹ Strausse and Howe, 302-3; Smith and Clurman, 46, 48-9; “What sets Boomers apart from Matures and Xers is the sense of privilege.”

²² Tex Sample, *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 15.

²³ Smith and Clurman theorize this characteristic as formative for Boomers: “Vietnam War protests and the environmental movement were markers of the moral certainty felt by these Boomers. They recognized that they were growing up in a pretty good system with a lot of exciting promise, but they believed it still needed fixing – not however, the significant rebuilding from the ground up that [their predecessors] had faced during their formative years. Boomers felt the system was perfectible if they could just locate the evil within it and root it out. Their mission, as they chose to accept it, was to push the system closer to perfection. Flaws stuck out to Boomers. These contrasted sharply with the promise of how things ought to be.” (49)

²⁴ Strauss and Howe, 302.

newness and success.²⁵ Today, Boomers are a dominant demographic that carry an “orientation to principle”²⁶ and see themselves as a positive force improving themselves, their world’s systems and institutions, and ultimately their world.

Education. For Boomers, principles and ideals are conceptual resources that define an approach for engaging and redefining the world. Even in the church over the last several years, the summons to ministry, “who feels called to...” has been generally replaced by the harvesting of “new ideas.” Boomers drove the Consciousness Revolution, overflowed America’s institutions of higher education, and still thirst for new knowledge. They’re the force behind the mass market for professional training and continuing education.²⁷ They are better educated than their parents, 80% having a high school education and 26% having college degrees.²⁸ This particular emphasis on education, of course, has not been lost on the Community of Christ. The church has increased expectations for its professional ministry, seen growth and expansion in Temple School, and the inauguration of the first Community of Christ seminary.

Confronted by the challenge of transforming themselves and their surroundings, Boomer’s have faith in the transforming power of education. Education is key to how we grow, live, learn, and develop the capacity to make things better for ourselves and our world. Reaching across dimensions, education is also central to professional success and upward mobility.²⁹

Stress and Control Oriented. Striving for personal power, marketers report that Boomers like to think for themselves, be involved, and in-the-know.³⁰ They also report, “Boomers are the most stressed generation in history.”³¹ Combining these factors, Boomers consistently foster a lifestyle trapped amidst an attachment to involvement and over commitment. Boomers struggle with “too many things to do, too

²⁵ Strauss and Howe, 301-302; Smith and Clurman, 43-49.

²⁶ Strauss and Howe, 302.

²⁷ Smith and Clurman, 63.

²⁸ Smith and Clurman, 43.

²⁹ Tex Sample, 101; Smith and Clurman, 43.

³⁰ Smith and Clurman, 63-62.

³¹ Smith and Clurman, 59.

many responsibilities to manage, and too many decisions to make.”³² There is the consistent stress to manage career, self, and family.

As a result, Boomers negotiate by seeking a simpler life that allows them to remain in control.³³ In spite of stress, Boomers refuse to let go of their busy lives, complex relationships, idealist impulses, and dreams for freedom, to journey, and create self-expression. Boomers demand to participate, yet without giving up their perspective or autonomy.³⁴

III. Leaders & Leavers: A Demographic Portrait of the Baby Boom in the Church

The first half of this essay has been preparatory, focusing on the importance and basic concepts of generational study, as well as a brief profile of America’s Baby Boom. Now, we turn to the specifics of Boomers and the church.

The following demographic portrait provides a helpful vantage point to begin our examination of the reformation the Baby Boom is bringing upon the Reorganization. Beginning with the most basic components church leadership and membership, I start by illustrating the Boomers’ redefining influence on the church two fold. First, I depict the dominant position Baby Boomers hold in highest offices of institutional influence and spiritual leadership in the present church. Most obviously, this statistically indicates the overwhelming fact of this generation’s dominant perspective driving the church’s spiritual matters and its administration.³⁵

Secondly, however, my demographic sketch also draws from a larger sociological perspective. I illustrate the Baby Boom’s role in the current crisis of decline and participation in the North American church. This crisis of decline is the present condition of the church’s call for transformation. This simple

³² Ibid., 60.

³³ Smith and Clurman, 51. “*The struggle to remain in control, to get the meaningful rewards to which they have always felt entitled, has motivated much of the behavior we’ve seen from Boomers in the marketplace since the end of the seventies. This will continue to be true as Boomers move in the next millennium.*” [italics, author’s]

³⁴ Smith and Clurman, 62. “Both needs must be satisfied simultaneously.”

³⁵ Of course, for many RLDS Baby Boomers, this natural succession of their generation to the next generation of church leadership has been a right and expectation. From a traditional view, especially those with a long heritage, this would most likely seem a natural event whose time would come.

fact has been lost on the church in its generational discussions, especially because of the spotlight that has placed on “young adults” and their peculiar absence. I point out that, in fact, it is the Baby Boom’s historical role as a generation of religious reformers and their drifting from institutional religion that precedes the strong decline of participation of younger generations.

A Generation of Leaders

Starting with the highest levels of leadership, at present Baby Boomers occupy 15 of the 18 offices of the Community of Christ’s leading quorums.³⁶ Stated in a percentage, 83% of the First Presidency, Presiding Bishopric, and Council of Twelve are Baby Boomers and North Americans.³⁷ This measurement simply confirms that fact that Boomers are *the* generation whose sermons, addresses, Herald articles, program initiatives, and divine inspirations now direct the church. They are the ones who guide its efforts, manage its controversies, and attempt to contain its attention.

While from a traditional North American perspective, this position of Boomers as the next wave (or generation) of church leadership may seem a normal chain of events, the overwhelming presence of North American Baby Boomers in church leadership is actually controversial once we consider the make-up of Baby Boomer participation in the church. It is non-representative of the church on at least two fronts: first, on the grounds of the church’s growing international membership; second, on the diminished presence of Baby Boomers in actual attendance of Community of Christ congregations.

³⁶ As I will note later, Boomers are defined as those born between 1943 and 1964. By “leading quorums,” I mean the Joint Council, i.e. the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, and Presiding Bishopric. Strausse and Howe, leading publishers of academic resources on generational theory define Baby Boomers as those born between 1943-1960. Smith and Clurman of Yankelovich Partners, Inc., a prominent consumer research organization, define Baby Boomers as those born between 1946–1964. Wade Clark Roof, a leading voice on Baby Boomers and American churches in the sociology of religion, defines boomers being born between 1946-1962. Using these ranges inclusively (1943-1964), Baby Boomers make up 15 of 18 members of the First Presidency, Presiding Bishop, and Council of Twelve. Cultural demographics, of course, define the relevance of generational categorizations. Thus, members counted as Baby Boomers were either from the U.S. or Canada, W. Grant McMurray being the only Canadian. Those not classified as Baby Boomers are President Ken Robinson (b.1941, Australia), President Judd (b 1943 England), and Bunda Chibwe (b. 1955, Zambia). For reference, see William Straus and Neil Howe, *Generations*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 299. J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman, *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 46. Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 34.

³⁷ Speaking here of World Church leadership, the Baby Boom is a North American phenomenon.

First, according to a report by Larry Tyree in 2001, in 1992 more persons began meeting for church on Sunday morning outside North America than within.³⁸ In short, the dominant position the North American church has held in the Reorganization, not to mention North American identity of the RLDS church itself, took a numerical turn in 1992 based on the most basic measurement of church activity: congregational attendance.³⁹ This anticipated and historic reversal puts unprecedented pressure on the current church administration to consider its tradition of leadership and its representation of increasingly diverse and international membership.⁴⁰ The 83% ethnically white middle-class Baby Boomers faces this unprecedented challenge convincingly represent an increasingly international and cultural diverse church. As the generation leading transformation, this basic test of transformation distinctly belongs to this first generation of predominantly Baby Boomer “Community of Christ” leaders.

However, what is significant to the North American scope of this generational study is that the unusual concentration of Baby Boomers in church leadership is remarkably disproportionate considering U.S. membership alone, where Boomers only make up only 41%, and even this statistic is misleading. Membership does not equal church attendance or other forms of church participation (tithing, staffing at youth camps, etc.). 41% grossly over-represents the actual number of Boomers active in the church. In fact, this 41% represents a turning point church participation and activity that can be generationally attributed to the Baby Boom. The Baby Boom is not a generation of leaders alone.

We know demographically, Boomers were the first generation of the generations alive in the church to radically distinguish religious affiliation from religious participation. Boomers often grew up in a denomination, only later to leave and never return to church activity.⁴¹ Hence, many of the

³⁸ For info on church participation in National Churches vs U.S., see Larry Tyree’s “Mission to North America” report. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Independence, Missouri)

³⁹ Ironically, 1992 also marks the year that an influx of Baby Boomers began into the Council of Twelve and other leadership positions. This will be discussed further in the later sections of this paper.

⁴⁰ The theological form of this question posed to traditional understandings of priesthood and leadership is, why is God continually calling mainly middle aged and ethnically European and Anglo-American men and women to spiritually lead the church given the growth of church activity overseas and the decline in North American and European membership?

⁴¹ “Generally it is expected that as members of a generation age, religious belief and religious involvement will rise. Even rebellious youth, once they married, had children, and settled down... would one again reaffirm their childhood faiths and

Boomers on the church's rolls are likely members who were baptized, but later stopped attending congregations only to hold on to their nominal affiliation. It is highly unlikely that this 41% is actually "present" in the church, and anecdotal evidence suggests it is not.⁴² A very generous estimate of Baby Boomer participation in the U.S. is probably somewhere closer to 24%. (24% is simply with the percentage of Boomers actually making up the U.S. population).⁴³ However, this high percentage, too, is unlikely. We know that Boomers are the last generation to have their baptismal numbers proportionately coincide with their presence in U.S. population. Boomers are the last generation whose membership numbers roughly match the number of Boomers actually present in society outside the church.⁴⁴ Moreover, it is doubtful that Community of Christ Baby Boomers are more loyal church-goers than their non-Community of Christ counterparts. A Gallop Poll in 1998 indicated that only 40% of persons aged 30-64 said they'd been to church or synagogue in the last seven days.⁴⁵ This statistic would push weekly attendance of U.S. Baby Boomers down to around to only 10%.

Therefore, Boomers mark an overwhelming presence in church leadership while simultaneously, as a generation, the Baby Boom marks a dramatic shift in actual church participation and activity. This impact can't be overstated. In the Community of Christ, it has carried through to younger generations.⁴⁶

reconnect with religious institutions. But with Boomers this did not happen." Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. . (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 53. This change in habit has affected the importance of attending church for later generations. Gallup research indicates that persons in America responding to the question, "Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days, or not?" gave positive answers ranged from 41% in 1939, 49% in 1958, and back down to 40% in 1975, while percentages have only fluctuated 2-3% from 40% in '89, '94, '98. George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*. (Harrisburg: Moorehouse Publishing, 1999), 15.

⁴² My understanding that it would be impossible to actually verify the number of Baby Boomers active and participating in North American congregations because such statistics are not reliably or uniformly kept.

⁴³ 24% is calculated with information provided by www.census.gov. This 24% of the U.S. population equates to a population that exceeds the population of California, New York, and Texas combined. Statistic available in Don Potter, "Betting on the Boomers," *Restaurant Hospitality* 87, no 4 (April 2003): 46-48. For comparison, Smith and Clurman site boomers at the printing of their text in 1997 at 78 million (46).

⁴⁴ Larry Tyree's "Mission to North America" report. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Independence, Missouri)

⁴⁵ George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs*. (Harrisburg; Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 14-15.

⁴⁶ Generation X, born roughly 1964 to 1982, and Millennials, born roughly 1982-2000. For information on Generation X see William Straus and Neil Howe, *Generations*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991); J. Walker Smith and Ann Clurman, *Rocking the Ages: The Yankelovich Report on Generational Marketing*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997); Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998);

By 2000, less than half of those aged 8-19 were represented on the rolls of the church. (See Appendix A) Thus, the reason Boomers proportionally consist a high 41% of U.S. membership while only 24% of the U.S. population is because baptisms of younger generations have considerably dropped off. This makes the comparative proportion of Boomers membership appear much larger. Paradoxically, as a generation of leaders Boomers play a pivotal role in the graying of the North American church.

As we turn to the next section, I will focus on the Baby Boom as a generation of leaders in the church. It is already clear that the anti-establishment euphemism of the 1960's, "Don't trust anyone over 30," was reformulated for a segment of Boomers in the church into "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." In the church alone, Boomers who've remained institutionally committed now celebrate an 83% occupancy in the Community of Christ's leading quorums. This generation's rise to leadership is inseparable from any understanding the collective consciousness of the church, and its current message of transformation amidst a membership where older generations continue to prevail while younger generations decline. Inspired to be spiritual change agents, the Baby Boom's principled commitment to change has provided them a "natural" assent to influence. Now, a segment of professional, educated, and liberal Baby Boomers dominate our leadership. The remainder of this paper dedicates itself to understanding the impact of this generation's assent and the impact on the Baby Boom transformation has had on the church to date.

Craig Kenneth Miller, *Post Moderns*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996); Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998); Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*. (Nashville: Broadman Holman Publishers, 2000); For information on the Millennials, see Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 4. See also Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998)

IV. Historic Events: The Baby Boom and RLDS Reform

Preparing for the Boom: the Next Generation to Lead the Church

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Graceland College was already preparing for the arrival of the first Baby Boomers.⁴⁷ Following 1958 and Roy Cheville's call to Presiding Patriarch,⁴⁸ sociologist of religion, Lloyd Young, was hired to Graceland's Religion Department as a key part of a "very concerned attempt to bring Graceland into the business of educating future members of the church leadership."⁴⁹ Young was forward thinking and charged with instituting a four-year religion program for Graceland It was to be the only four-year degree available at Graceland for sometime.⁵⁰

Young's installment coincided with other academic and administrative appointments at Graceland that were part of an intentional makeover. It was a time of making way for new ideas and critical thought at Graceland and in the church.⁵¹ Leeland Negaard and Paul M. Edwards were hired to Graceland's philosophy department in the early 1960's. During the same years, Graceland's history faculty began applying historical criticism to the sacred stories of church history and many of the Reorganization's sacred Restoration myths.

The gathering of fresh minds was a part of a larger movement in the General Church, which had a formative effect on the young Baby Boomers growing up in the church.⁵² Extending far beyond Graceland, the reach of these new currents extended well into the RLDS Religious Education Department.

⁴⁷ Graceland is the church's only affiliated institution of higher education, and in these decades, its student population was overwhelmingly RLDS, over 90%.

⁴⁸After the ordination of women, this office has been reassigned as Presiding Evangelist.

⁴⁹ Paul Edwards, email. January 13, 2004.

⁵⁰ Ibid, email. For an example of Lloyd Young's progressive perspectives of basic Christian doctrines, see Lloyd R. Young, "Concerning the Virgin Birth." Herald (February 1, 1964); 5-6, 22.

⁵¹ This kind of shift was concurrent with the ripple going through America's churches and institutions of higher education in the 1950's and 60's as academic and religious thought grappled with deep running questions confronting modern civilization after the Holocaust and two World Wars.

⁵² The church was involved in a number of dialogues and theological explorations. This was evidenced in many Herald House publications at the time, such as Harold Schneebeck, Jr.'s *The Body of Christ* (1968) and Don Landon's and Robert Smith's *For What Purpose Assembled* (1969), as well as the New Curriculum. The most prominent example of this new theological movement is the first edition of *Exploring the Faith*, an unofficial systematic approach to the faith and doctrine of the church. The committee responsible was headed by Clifford Cole and appointed in 1966. See, *Exploring the Faith: A Series of Studies in the Faith of the Church Prepared by a Committee on Basic Beliefs*. (Independence: Herald House, 1970); Harold Schneebeck Jr., *The Body of Christ*. (Independence: Herald House, 1968); and Donald Landon and Robert Smith, *For What Purpose Assembled*. (Independence: Herald House, 1969)

Eventually, the church's New Curriculum would be proposed with new insights and theological approaches to the time-held doctrines and traditional disposition of the church. These currents, of course, launched controversy. Graceland's *University Bulletin* recorded some of this energy in an edition entitled "Restoration Amidst Revolution" in 1968.⁵³ In it, orthodox Restoration ideas, like Zion, plenary inspiration, and 'the One True Church' identity, underwent critical reassessment by church leaders and intellectuals. Authors included names like Clifford Cole, Paul M. Edwards, Maurice Draper, Geoffrey Spencer, Lloyd Young, Charles Neff, and Barbara Higdon.⁵⁴ This wave of change shaking the foundations of the church struck at the heart of many members' sense of RLDS identity. These were the formative years of religious education for many of the church's young Baby Boomers. Tensions over the "New Curriculum" and "Position Papers"⁵⁵ rippled through the church into the 1970's, eventually polarizing the church in the 1980's. These events set the stage for the processes of change currently sought by the Baby Boomer leadership of the church, heralded under the banner of transformation. Understanding these events as the conditions that make this spiritual quest for transformation possible is central to understanding the generational factors defining the church up through the present day.

The Gender Revolution: Boomers & the Schism that Redefined the Reorganization

A pivotal point in this wave of change was the ordination of women in 1984. The gender revolution had finally reached the church. Its principles and political force were finally threatening the authority of religious tradition and its institutions. For the RLDS church, the cultural expressions of RLDS faith were now being called into question. Though clearly no generation can be "blamed" for the split, it was clear both in and outside the church that a new school of thinking was addressing and reshaping America's churches – a way of thinking that is unthinkable without the Baby Boom and the 1960's.

⁵³ See the Graceland publication, "Restoration Amidst Revolution," *University Bulletin* 20 no.2 and 3 (Winter 1968)

⁵⁴ This list is of both scholars and church leaders.

⁵⁵ A copy of the "Position Papers" is available at the Temple Library.

The ordination of women was not a singular event, but a watershed. Many people in the Reorganization are unaware that the same year the RLDS affirmed women for ordination, the Southern Baptist Convention, following a conservative takeover, denied women leadership positions, specifically pastorates. Across America, in and outside the Reorganization, forces of social change and religious questioning were confronting the patriarchal culture of American religion and social structure. Over time, the Sixties revolution had fostered a current of principles and new thinking that continued to confront present conditions. The demands to recreate ourselves under the principles of human agency, greater freedom, and personal expression were finally penetrating America's religious institutions. What was at stake in America's churches, as the Reorganization was a model case, was not simply religious belief but the very structures of religious tradition, identity, and authority. Unfortunately, the shift in polity (ordination of women) for the Reorganization resulted in a schism that lingered for several years. In the pain of remembering all those who left, the church often forgets the many cultural progressives for which the ordination had come too late.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, for those who remained loyal to the Reorganization the schism over women in the priesthood would literally redefine the church. In its wake, forces of religious reform would reshape the church under the strain of liberal and conservative tensions that would simultaneously split the church and free it for further change.

The Restorationist split, or Fundamentalist schism,⁵⁷ following the ordination of women took its shape from mounting liberal/conservative tensions. A division in the membership was forming over a war to either preserve or change the existing web of doctrines and practices that defined RLDS identity, its spiritual authority, and practiced traditions. Women's access to the authority structures of the church became the battleground. These battle lines being drawn coincided with the cultural rift that was forming

⁵⁶ Perhaps because of disappointment with the church, according to graphs of membership trends in the church, membership in North America began declining in 1980.

⁵⁷ Bill Russell accurately uses the term "Fundamentalist Schism." See William Russell, "The Fundamentalist Schism, 1958-Present" in *Let Contention Cease*, Roger D. Launius and W.B. "Pat" Spillman, eds. (Independence, Graceland/Park Press, 1991)

in the 1970's and 1980's in the wake of the Baby Boom. Historians and researchers William Strauss and Neil Howe explain:

“As Boomers began entering midlife, a schism had emerged between mostly fortyish modernists and New Agers at one edge, and mostly thirtyish traditionalists and evangelicals at the other. Each side refused to compromise on matters of principle...This values clash reflects an important bipolarity between the generation's first and last wave, whose differences have been widely noted by pollsters.”⁵⁸

The demographic size of the Baby Boom was reshaping the platforms of America's Right and Left. As adults, this generation had become a defining cultural force and the religious, social, and political dimensions of American life were being implicated.

Tex Sample expands on this cultural polarization theologically. On the cultural left was a more affluent and educated class who emulated a “journey theology.” This group's spiritual vision emphasized individual reflection, personal development, a quest for connection, and a moral conviction for greater tolerance and acceptance.⁵⁹ Questions about religious identity, spirituality, and morality were framed with a clear emphasis on the self, personal perspective, openness, and a concern for “fit.” As a class, there were the “relativists” made famous by the Christian fundamentalism.

On the other end of the spectrum was the cultural right. For this group, religion was viewed as a *way* of life rather than a *view* of it. The demand for a tangible collective identity and sense of belonging juxtaposed itself to liberal tolerance and benevolence toward seemingly religious and moral contradictions. What was at stake was the very fabric of moral and religious life. Religion centered on a theology of identity that served to identify parameters about ‘who we are,’ which stabilized conscious and unconscious identifications of who was in and who was out.⁶⁰ Engagement in the world and

⁵⁸ Strauss and Howe, 304. See also Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, 89-148;

⁵⁹ Sample, 45-54. Journey theology “recognizes that there is always a tension between Christ and culture and that critical reflection is an ongoing responsibility.” (45)

⁶⁰ Sample, 83-95. Sample describes these culturally right using the descriptors “popular religion” and “folk theology.” Popular religion functions as a ‘religion of the people’ designed to meet real religious needs. While folk theology centers God language around formative populous concerns about identity, social and religious lines of demarcation and differentiation, and communal experience and expression.

understanding about how one ought to live was founded in a spirituality of common identity, collective history, and shared values.

In the Reorganization, these cultural poles become the context for the split in the church. Liberal and conservative forces drew lines that formed an ideological divide, which pit many people up against the question of loyalty to either change or tradition in the church. At stake was the very issue of identity and authority.

On the one hand, liberal currents were claiming the prophetic structures of the institutional church, drawing on its authority to call for change. Women were ordained, which was followed by a generational shift in the leading quorums of the church.⁶¹ The liberalized church “journeyed” onward to the building of the Temple⁶² and further questions about the meaning and reinterpretation of RLDS tradition and identity. A non-Smith was sustained in the Presidency. There was a call for transformation and the church changed its name.

On the other hand, conservatives called back the forces of change to preserve the cultural memory of RLDS tradition and identity. In the minds of dissenters, the memory of traditional RLDS dogmas, the church’s cultural expressions, and knowledge of its true identity could not be separated. The church’s patriarchy became the symbol its true heritage and the rallying point for true authority. Restorationists declared a heresy on the church’s leadership. They contested and ultimately rejected the Prophet’s message (Section 156). Armed with principle and conviction, they rebelled against the authority of the World Conference and two decades of insecurity about RLDS identity. These cultural and theological differences irreconcilable, the Restorationist factions seceded. Apart, they faced simultaneous theological and organizational conundrums about how to restructure priesthood authority. Multiple Restorationist movements eventually formed. For many members active in the church prior to 1984, these events have yet to become history. They are a part of our current memory.

⁶¹ This will be demonstrated in depth in the next section.

⁶² It is often overshadowed, but Section 156, which called for the ordination of women also called for the development of the Center Place for the building of the Temple.

In sum, the watershed of women in the priesthood formed a schism in the church that was not simply a matter strong feelings and theological differences. The forces redefining the RLDS church were representative of a cultural and ideological divide – a divide redefining America’s own social, religious, and cultural fabric. It is no wonder that the breaking point in the church’s growing tension was a change in the very structure and expression of the church’s culture and authority: its priesthood.

Of course, the roots of these changes historically reach beyond the Baby Boom. It was the previous administration’s openness to currents of ecumenical dialogue, liberal theology and progressive social thinking that instigated a movement of new critical insights and spiritual principles to permeate the church. However, the demographic impact and influence of the Baby Boom must be implicated in the forced division of loyalties. The cultural divide that eventually penetrated the foundations of the RLDS identity and tradition would not have been possible without the Baby Boom’s natural magnification of the questions destabilizing religious and social authority. Moreover, this generation’s sense of spirituality was distinguishing itself with the reinvention of the norms defining religious identity.

In the next section, I take up Wade Clark Roof’s research on Baby Boomer spirituality and sense of religious identity. Attention subtly shifts in terms of emphasis from the Baby Boom as a generational force to the specificity the RLDS Baby Boom as seen through this generation’s rise to leadership. Following the church’s schism, there is the clearest indication of the Baby Boom’s redefinition of the church as a liberal educated and professional class of Baby Boomers come to fill the church’s leadership structures and explicitly call for its transformation. As discussions move closer to the present, it will become more obvious that the church we know today is not understandable or accessible outside familiarity with the ideals and influences of America’s Baby Boom.

I begin with a brief discussion of Wade Clark Roof’s description of Boomer spirituality and its impact on the norms of religious identity. This will provide conceptual linkage for tying the Baby Boom’s effect on the church and this generation’s rise to leadership. I follow with an historical outline of

the current generation's rise to leadership and the correlating initiatives that explicitly set out to transform the Reorganized church.

V. A Baby Boomer Transformation: A Generation's Spirituality and Rise to Leadership

Boomer Spirituality: the Quest for Transformation & The Revolution of Religious Identity

In *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, Wade Clark Roof discusses the "quest culture" Baby Boomers have created out of American religion. Boomer spirituality, he says, is not about religion or institutions, but a journey. Religion, for Boomers, serves a spirituality that is process oriented. Baby Boomer's define the spiritual as a quest for a "deeper level of encounter with the sacred" that "cannot be contained by intellect, cognition, or institutional structure," but "reaches for unity" and "abhors fixity in the *interest of transformation*."⁶³ [emphasis mine] Transformation speaks to something beyond mere change to something that is "deeply existential, directed to connections with ultimate meanings, values, and ethical commitment."⁶⁴

Religious identities in the wake of the Baby Boom, he writes, "are fluid, multilayered, and to a considerable extent personally achieved" in contemporary society.⁶⁵ Boomers have transformed society's traditional sense of religious identity by stripping from religious institutions the power to define religious identity, spirituality, and denominational distinction. Boomers demand to choose and define religious identity personally. A person's or organization's religious identity can be created as much it is inherited. In American Christianity, this revolution has caused a simultaneous loss of interest in mainstream denominationalism, a revolution of interfaith and ecumenical possibilities, and eclectic spirituality.

Boomers organize their spirituality and sense of religious identity around the importance of "lived religion." Lived religion is defined by a corresponding sets of "scripts" and "codes" that provide the

⁶³ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 35.

spiritually-lived life its framework and prescribed meaning.⁶⁶ “Scripts” are the stories, or grand narratives, which have the power to transcend history. They reach beyond the limits of space and time, containing symbols (persons, people, places, events, objects) that portray the world and the forces that reveal what life is about. Scripts are not only told or taught, but dramatized through personal, as well as communal, rituals and practices. These “codes,” in turn, generate the corresponding moral and behavioral prescriptions that religious adherents and communities confess and share.

In the wake of the 1960’s, the spiritual revolution of human agency led Boomers to question traditional religious authorities. Impregnable authority of institutional religious “scripts” was critiqued and dismantled, their moral and habitual “codes” diminished or rejected, and faith was reinvented. The demand for individual expression and personal connection turned the gaze of lived religion inward.⁶⁷ Old notions of religious authority were replaced by an emphasis on individual belief and personal spirituality, which focused heavily on the search for connection, the needs of everyday life, and therapies for the self. The foundations of religious belief, spiritual practice, and moral expectation were reformed to meet the needs of inner experience and an internal sense of personal responsibility.

In the history of the Reorganization and the Baby Boom thus far, we can see in the formative years of RLDS Baby Boomers a correspondence with the emergence of RLDS Baby Boomer spirituality. There was a break from traditional RLDS “scripts” (what some scholars have called the “Restoration myth”) that precipitated the current crisis of RLDS identity. Incrementally, the church steadily moved away from stories that defined for generations the divine reasons for gathering, practicing, and celebrating RLDS identity, and joining the RLDS community. Cottage meetings dropped off. The “Go Ye and Teach” slides got dusty. Eventually, the “scripts” that told of the church’s divine origins, the “fullness” of its scriptural canon, its sole priesthood authority, and special eschatological purpose were confronted by the

⁶⁶ For fuller discussion, see *Spiritual Marketplace*, 46-71.

⁶⁷ In the wake of the Baby Boom, Roof states, “Uprooted in the faith and family traditions, many Americans are looking within themselves in hopes of finding a God not bound by older canons of literalism, moralism, and patriarchy, in hopes that their own biographies might yield personal insight about the sacred.” *Spiritual Marketplace*, 57.

forces of a generation dismantling the world-view that corresponded with this version of RLDSism. For a large contingency of the Baby Boom, their changing world needed a religion that would change.

Of course, as the persuasion of traditional RLDS scripts waned so did the codes that defined collective RLDS life and practice. As previously stated, many RLDS Baby Boomers drifted from the church. Over the life of those who stayed, participation in church services, Wednesday Night Prayer service, youth camps and reunions have all gone into decline. Prescriptions for worship, sacred music, and Sunday dress have been rewritten. There were the structural changes in the practice of open communion and the ordination of women. The RLDS church remains in a time of transition. A new generation of leaders face the simultaneous crises of decline and identity.

*The Political Transition Preceding the Call for Transformation:
The Rise of Liberal Educated Baby Boomers to Leadership*

Many members today recognize a process of grieving and cutting ties in between 1984 to 1996 following the church's schism. It was a time of planning and reformulation that included denominational warnings to the church's dissenters.⁶⁸ Temple building was going on and swirling around its twisting spire was also the revolution of spiritual change. For the Reorganization, the Temple would be a symbol that vibrant life was still operating in the church⁶⁹ and the meaning of the Restoration somehow still went on. It would provide an opportunity to reorient the Reorganization in a new age where the church had to redefine itself. This began with a gradual influx of educated and theologically liberal Baby Boomers into the leading administrative offices of the church.

The first early Baby Boomer, Jack Kirkpatrick (b. 1943), was ordained Apostle in 1988. In 1992, three Baby Boomers were ordained to the Council of Twelve, David R. Brock, Lawrence W. Tyree, and Stephen M. Veazey. In the same year, Larry Norris was ordained to the Presiding Bishopric, and Baby

⁶⁸ See Doctrine and Covenants 157:11-17, especially 14-15. For information on the "Fundamentalist Schism", see William Russell, "The Fundamentalist Schism, 1958-Present" in *Let Contention Cease*, Roger D. Launius and W.B. "Pat" Spillman, eds. (Independence, Graceland/Park Press, 1991)

⁶⁹ It was well publicized, Temple fund raising exceeded its goals and on the day of dedication, was paid for in full and fully endowed.

Boomer and Graceland grad, W. Grant McMurray, was called to be a counselor in the First Presidency. In 1994, three more Boomers were ordained to the Council of Twelve Apostles: Danny A. Belrose, Dale E. Luffman, and Kenneth L. McLaughlin. In 1996, W. Grant McMurray simultaneously ended the succession of Smiths in the Presidency of the Reorganization and provided the Boomers one of their in the church's top office. On the heels of his Transformation proclamation, W. Grant McMurray calls the first women into the Council of Twelve, Boomers Gail Mengel and Linda Booth, in 1998. Leonard Young, author of *Communities of Joy*, is ordained Apostle in 2000.

Boomers in Leadership: the Explicit Quest to Transform the Church

Two years before W. Grant McMurray was ordained President, *Communities of Joy* signaled the first sound of transformation. A new generation was taking its place in higher offices. Authored by Len Young, a Baby Boomer and director of the church's Congregational Resources department, *Communities of Joy* was a congregational program subtitled "New Experiences in Congregational Life". Its vision was to transform the church's dated approach to congregational life.

Communities of Joy was a conceptual generational makeover. Specifically speaking to the inadequacies of institutional church and its failure to address the needs and experiences of the world's spiritual pilgrims, *Communities of Joy* targeted the "weakness of structured models"⁷⁰ and attempted to address the "fuzziness" of ministry in our changing world. It stated the "ineffectiveness" of time-honored approaches that didn't help "disciples of Jesus" who were "on a pilgrimage searching for the meaning of life."⁷¹ *Communities of Joy* answered the call with a conceptual model of the ideal congregation. Reinvented in a generational worldview, ideal congregations would form around personal gifts and interpersonal ministry, principled-centered leadership, and participation through building relationships.⁷² What was needed was a new emphasis on the person and the need to connect. *Communities of Joy*

⁷⁰ Leonard M. Young, *Communities of Joy* (Independence: Herald House, 1994), 185.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 17.

⁷² *Communities of Joy* drew on the work of Stephen Covey.

specifically did not address the church in the language of the collective tradition, i.e. Zion, the authority of the three standard books, priesthood calling, or any semblance of tradition and RLDS identity. Rather, it drew on an acronym for interpersonal ministry, J-O-Y: Jesus, Others, and You. It was in tacit juxtaposition to the priesthood paradigms of the tradition-driven church.

Communities of Joy offered a process of participation, which sought to transform congregational life through an organic process of reinventing its very organization. The three steps: Vision, Mission, and Celebration, concluded in promises of success, revitalization, and joy in the life of community for RLDS congregations. *Communities of Joy* was followed by an extensive educational resource intended to retrain and rehabilitate RLDS congregational leadership, known as the “Congregational Leader’s Handbook.”

Three years later, two symbolic events, the ordination of W. Grant McMurray, and the completion of the Temple, would signify a page-turn in RLDS tradition. This was the goals and speeches of Transformation 2000 (T2000). T2000 was a self-conscious alteration process designed to “engage [the church] in a process of identity-*changing*, mission-*shaping*, heart-*converting*, and mind-*altering* change.”⁷³ [emphasis mine] The call of Transformation 2000 effectively drew attention away from *Communities of Joy*’s congregational focus and onto the church’s central structures. Driven by optimistic goals, Transformation 2000 described a spiritual journey that would lead to vast numbers of new ministers in the church, new congregations, reconciliation and healing, and outreach to younger generations in its ministries and congregations.⁷⁴ At its heart, it was a call to join the leadership in its spiritual quest to refine the church at all levels.

Sunday, April 2 of the 2000 Jubilee World Conference, President McMurray brought an end to the temporal, but not spiritual, intentions of Transformation 2000 in his “We Have Become” address. The

⁷³ W. Grant McMurray, “Transforming the Church” address given August 9th at the 1998 Congregational Leaders Workshop in Lamoni, IA.

⁷⁴ The first quotation of W. Grant McMurray’s “We Have Become” address given at the 2000 World Conference states, “You came with us on the journey!” See, W. Grant McMurray, “Transformation 2000: We Have Become” given 2000 World Conference, Sunday, April 2, 2000. Available on line at http://www.cofchrist.org/docs/wc2000/en/we_have_become.asp Accessed January 31, 2004.

following day, the church's redefinition would continue in an outline of the goals and principles of "the Path of the Disciple."⁷⁵ Under its conceptual design, the Reorganization would be given a new language-base and set of spiritual values and paradigms in which to function. In a chain of events, four days later the Reorganization would no longer be known as the Reorganization. Relegated to history, the Reorganized Latter Day Saints would now be known as the "Community of Christ."

The "Path of the Disciple" underscores the leadership's continual spiritual quest to transform the church. It is a vision for personal and corporate spirituality framed specifically with Baby Boomer paradigms that reinterpret the church's tradition through the lens of Boomer spirituality. The language of each goal emphasizes the personal over the collective, invitation over expectation, education over assimilation, and flows from the "inner" to the "outer."

- "*Share your witness and resources*" speaks not to proselytizing and the obligation to tithe but of self-expression of one's experience with the Christ and voluntary giving.
- "*Allow the Spirit to fill you*" speaks not to priesthood authority or structured worship but toward seeking personal transformation through spiritual practice, internal experiences, and interpersonal groups.
- "*Extend the hand of Reconciliation*" speaks not about religious fidelity through repentance or righteousness but about becoming agent of change and transgressing the walls of denominational and religious identity.
- "*Learn and Teach the Sacred Story*" suggests not more Book of Mormon testimonies or surveys of sacred church history but about transforming the church through improved religious education and ministerial training.

⁷⁵ See W. Grant McMurray, "A Transforming Faith: Our Call to Discipleship" given 2000 World Conference, Monday, April 3, 2000. Available on line at http://www.cofchrist.org/docs/wc2000/en/our_call_to_discipleship.asp. Accessed, January 29, 2004.

- “*Embody Justice and Proclaim Peace*” and “*Create Diverse Communities*” speak not to moral codes and social conformity, but personal implicate church members in the challenges of community involvement and social change.

What is clear is that “The Path of the Disciple” is another step in one generation’s journey theology, a spiritual prescription created and defined by the spiritual paradigms of a liberal middle class Baby Boom.⁷⁶ The Path is an individualistically focused pilgrimage sighted on a change process. Its formulation projects out a collective hope for community that rests on the pilgrim’s personal responsibility to find and express her/his inner purpose and inner peace. It is defined by spiritual language that, if the church will follow, will direct the church toward an internal and external transformation. The Path ends not at Zion, but at an ideal ecumenical (if not interfaith) situation of reconciliation, spiritual fulfillment, and mutuality where all learn and teach together. Moreover, the words that back the Path with God’s purposes could not have been written prior to 1984, “The road to transformation travels both inward and outward. The road to transformation is the path of the disciple.”⁷⁷ The generational perspective from which the spiritual meaning of these words flows was not yet authoritative. They could not have been divinely spoken or even comprehensible outside the normalizing power and influence of America’s Baby Boom.

Conclusion

This paper is an introductory study: a culmination of several projects, none of which has been adequately or completely treated. Each of its sections could have easily commanded the research and explanation of a small book. However, as a whole, my hope is that it serves as an introduction to an alternative inquiry into the cultural forces redefining the church. In this way, I believe it fills an immense gap and critical purpose.

⁷⁶ See again, Sample, 45-54

⁷⁷ Doctrine & Covenants, 161:3d

The Community of Christ is undergoing incredible changes together with much of American Christianity. It faces a disappearing center for which a basis for understanding its own history and identity, as well as its future, might be defined. Many divergent forces lay claim to the church's future and its past.

In North America, the church struggles with the very real threat of membership decline. With unresolved issues around areas of sexuality and scripture, it faces factional possibilities. Its congregations are graying while internationally many churches are growing. Many are looking for answers. Some congregations have responded by turning to pop-congregational growth resources, while others have turned inward to Sunday School Programs centered on pre-1970 Herald House texts. The World Church has made responses with efforts to reach "youth" and "young adults." Yet, it does so with no public confession or demonstrable self-understanding of the narrow generational paradigms dominating its own vision, administrative paradigms, or political thinking.

Defined as Gen X, I write from a generational perspective virtually absent in the North American church. This provides me a unique perspective and critical distance from the force of the dominant paradigms currently defining the church's future vision and present controversies. Labeled a "young adult," I've received the confirmation that the church recognizes, too, that I am different than them. I believe it is because of my place in this relatively silent and different generational perspective that the generational character of the church's dominating language of ideas is easier for me to see.

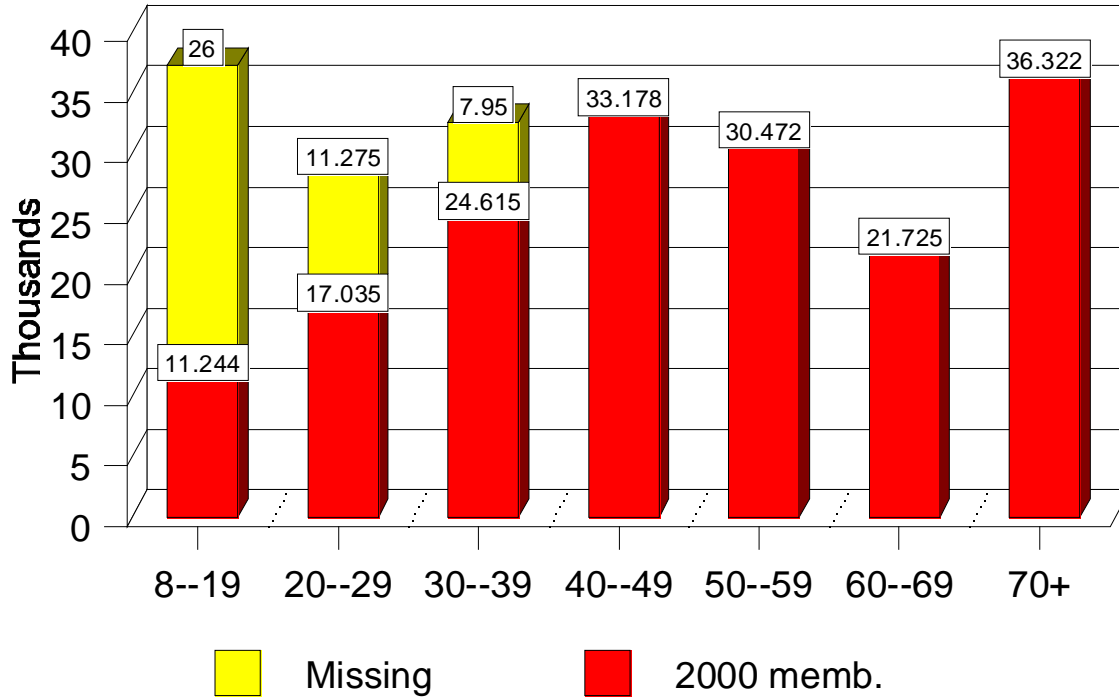
I think there would be little arguing that church has yet to immerge from forty years of transition. It's made its transition from sect to denomination just as Christian denominations in America are losing footing. The current generation of leadership must struggle to face this reality of double crises: identity and decline in participation. The present generational make-up and its search for a viable Community of Christ identity, theology, and mission that reconciles both a sense of tradition and needed change simply makes the RLDS church a case study for the Baby Boom's spiritual quest and sense of personal

responsibility to reinvent the religion it inherited. Words like “transformation” and “Community of Christ” could not speak more clearly to it.

“Transformation” speaks to the deep longings of a generation of RLDS Baby Boomers who seek to be freed from the sectarian and self-righteous confines of an obscure “distinctive” tradition, its overtly patriarchal structure, and claims to singular “one true church” authority. The words “Community of Christ” could not better state the hope of a generation to re-identify themselves with a name change that tells others of their hope to join the spiritual journey of other Christians ultimately committed to Christ’s ecumenical and global hope to save. Together, “transformation” and “Community of Christ” have outgrown as status as mere religious terms. They’ve been projected as spiritual symbols for a quest to join the world in hopes of renewed congregations and a renewed humanity. “Peace” and “justice” are the transpersonal ideals that flow out of this generation’s revolutionary history and sense of ethical commitment. In sum, the new lexicon of the Restoration – “transformation,” “community,” “Christ,” “peace,” and “justice,” – speak both, globally and personally, of Boomer spiritual vision for a better church and world.

The question that remains is whether a next generation will find enough meaning in these paradigms to be inspired to participate in this spiritual reinvention of the church. Or will they, too, have to “wait for enough people to die” or withstand a schism to see change in the church for themselves and give these terms their own meanings? Frankly, generational waves of leadership and centralized spiritual authority structure part of the problem. In the wake of the Baby Boom, fewer and fewer people are waiting for organized religion to speak the truths of their own spirituality. Therein lies one of the greatest challenges of transformation.

Missing Generations



Source: Larry Tyree, "Mission to North America" report. Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Independence, Missouri), 2001

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